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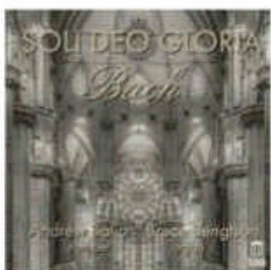
ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

JS Bach

'Soli Deo Gloria'

JS Bach Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig, BWV644. Das alte Jahr vergangen ist, BWV614. Cantata No 161 – Der Leib zwar in der Erden. Capriccio, BWV992. Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV625. Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund, BWV621. Durch Adams Fall is ganz verderbt, BWV637. Erbarm' dich mein, o Herre Gott, BWV721. Es ist das Heil uns kommen her, BWV638. Herr Gott nun sei gepreiset, BWV601. Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend – BWV623; BWV655. Herzlich tut mich verlangen, BWV727. Ich ruf zu dir, BWV639. In dulci jubilo, BWV608. Jesu meine Freude, BWV610. Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter, BWV650. Lobt Gott ihr Christen, alle gleich, BWV609. Nun komm, der heiden Heiland, BWV659. O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross, BWV622. Sonatas – BWV1014; BWV1018; BWV1030*b*; BWV1031; BWV1032. Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein, BWV641. Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten, BWV642 (all transcr Balio) **Reiche Abblasen**
Andrew Balio *tpt* **Bruce Bengtson** *org*
Delos (M) (2) DE3560 (114' • DDD)



Inspired by Pablo Casals's belief in playing Bach every day, and the

conviction that Bach aspired to a sense of time 'that was like God's, that of eternity', Baltimore Symphony principal trumpet Andrew Balio has recorded two hours of his own transcriptions of flute and violin sonatas and a host of chorale preludes he thought could be 'further illumined, renewed, or glorified by the trumpet'.

Balio's long-lined handling of the chorales, the soaring ease and grace with which he reaches stratospheric heights and the expressive use he makes of his occasional trills create a sense of latent power behind the purity of tone and intonation that coincides with his sense of the music's own spiritual overtones. Eschewing the usual excerpts from the big choral works and cantatas, not to mention the Second *Brandenburg Concerto*, Balio has crafted a tribute to how naturally the trumpet becomes Bach's voice in a church

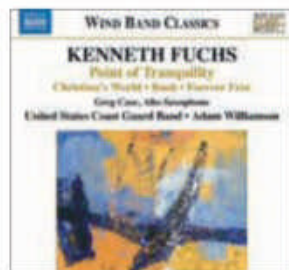
setting. And yet, while the programme suggests reflection, things like the A major energy of BWV1032 opening up into the *Orgelbüchlein's* radiant 'In dulci jubilo', the delights of BWV1031 including its exquisite Siciliano, the serious pleasures of BWV1018 and much else besides make a strong case for purely musical beauty.

Balio and the imaginative organist Andrew Bengtson, at Paul Fritts's 35-stop Op 24 in the Reyes Organ and Choral Hall at the University of Notre Dame, achieve a stunning clarity of line, wide variety of colour and a sense of the right tempo that is complemented by the dynamic sheen and spaciousness of the audiophile recording.

Laurence Vittes

Fuchs

Christina's World. Discover the Wild. Forever Free. From the Field to the Sky. Point of Tranquility. Rush^a. United Artists
^a**Greg Case** *alto sax* **United States Coast Guard Band / Adam Williamson**
Naxos Wind Band Classics (B) 8 573567 (59' • DDD)



Let me say right from the outset that this disc is as engaging,

well performed and brightly recorded a programme of wind band music as I have encountered. And it is brilliantly well played and sonically very attractive indeed. That all the music was written by the excellent Kenneth Fuchs (*b*1956 and a student of Persichetti) – a disc of whose concertos I reviewed two years ago (*A/18*) – should be a surprise to no one familiar with his sumptuously scored and intelligently constructed orchestral and chamber music, issues of which have been reviewed in these pages for the past decade and more.

The alto saxophone concerto *Rush* (2012), in its full-orchestral guise, was one of the works I reviewed previously. As I commented then, it is 'a rather Bernsteinian diptych ... with a punchy, roof-raising final passacaglia'. If anything, it seems even more suited to a wind-orchestral accompaniment and Greg Case

is as convincing and fluent a soloist as was Timothy McAllister beforehand (also on Naxos). The 'fanfare-overture' *United Artists* (2008) also exists in two versions, the wind band version based on a 2005 work written for the fuller forces of the London Symphony Orchestra.

The remaining works fall into two basic types: bright and breezy, rather celebratory overtures – *Discover the Wild* (2010), *From the Field to the Sky* (2012) and *Forever Free* (2013) – and longer, more meditative pieces such as *Christina's World* (1997) and the title-track, *Point of Tranquility* (2017). Curiously these last two are, respectively, the oldest and most recent compositions featured, and both draw inspiration from paintings, by Morris Louis on the one hand, Andrew Wyeth on the other. I have not encountered the US Coast Guard Band before but on the evidence of this disc they are a formidably virtuoso ensemble. Naxos's sound is as full-bodied as the band's – a winning combination.

Guy Rickards

Herrmann

Whitman^a. Psycho: A Narrative^b.

Souvenirs de voyage^c

^c**David Jones** *cl* ^c**Netanel Draiblate**,

^c**Eva Cappelletti Chao** *vns* ^c**Philippe Chao** *va*

^c**Benjamin Capps** *vc* ^a**Murray Horwitz**,

^a**Annasophia Nicely**, ^a**William Sharp** *spkrs*

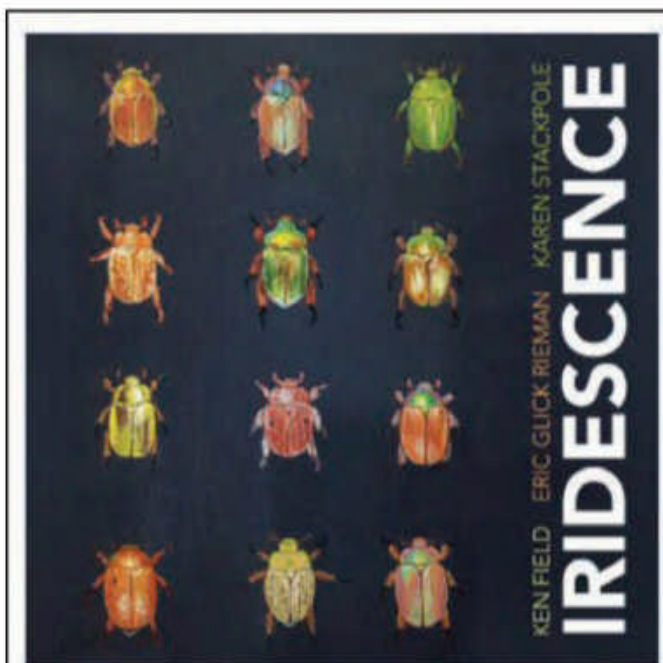
^{ab}**PostClassical Ensemble / Angel Gil-Ordóñez**

Naxos American Classics (B) 8 559883 (72' • DDD)



Like many successful Hollywood composers, Bernard Herrmann pursued

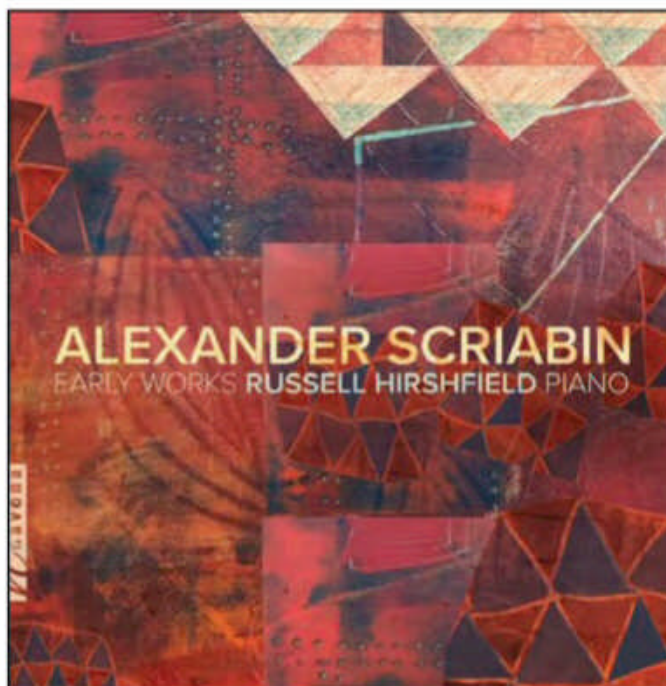
musical endeavours beyond (in his time) the celluloid. Studies at Juilliard were followed by conducting posts with the New Chamber Orchestra of New York and the CBS Symphony Orchestra, with which he championed music by major figures of the day, including Ives, even as he wrote music for radio programmes and composed concert works and, eventually, movie scores. Herrmann's versatility in three genres – radio, chamber music and film –



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ALEXANDER Scriabin: EARLY WORKS RUSSELL HIRSHFIELD

Russian composer Alexander Scriabin is known for his theory of musical colors as well as his untimely demise brought on by an unsanitary razor blade. American pianist and music professor Russell Hirshfield has now recorded an ambitiously broad selection of the composer's works which may well provide a novel talking point.

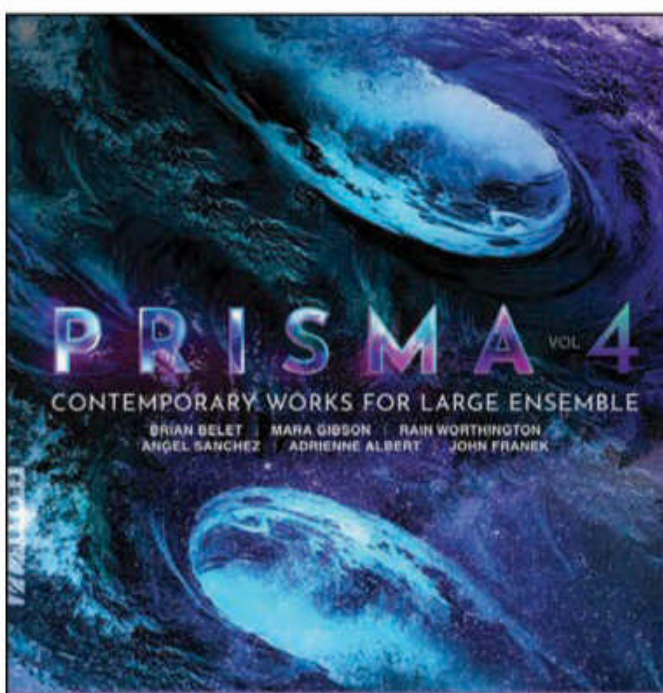
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Ease and grace: trumpeter Andrew Balio and organist Bruce Bengtson bring joy to transcriptions of Bach – see review on page 1

is captured on this absorbing recording featuring the PostClassical Ensemble, an experimental orchestral laboratory in residence at the Washington National Cathedral.

The most expansive piece is a 1944 radio play, *Whitman*, a collaboration between Herrmann and the writer Norman Corwin, offered here in a 2019 reconstruction by Christopher Husted. Most of the text is drawn from Whitman's collection *Leaves of Grass*, with additions by Corwin pertaining to the Second World War. Herrmann had already made his mark in the film world with the scores for Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* and Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* when he penned the string-orchestra music for *Whitman*. His contribution is largely atmospheric, a sphere in which he excelled – everything precisely gauged to the emotional and psychological moment. Even the quotations from American music sound newly considered as shaped by Herrmann. In this performance, the PostClassical Ensemble, led by Angel Gil-Ordóñez, do a handsome job supporting the narrative and baritone William Sharp, who reads Whitman's verses with noble vibrancy.

The ensemble also provide the requisite power and mystery in *Psycho: A Narrative* for string orchestra, a 1968 creation in

which Herrmann reworked themes from his score for the 1960 Alfred Hitchcock thriller. Reconstructed in 1999 by John Mauceri, the music weaves a transfixing spell, suggesting the plot's ominous twists and demonstrating Herrmann's virtuoso command of string techniques (most strikingly, indeed, in those shrieking stabs that jolt the shower scene).

Between radio and movie scores comes Herrmann's captivating *Souvenirs de voyage*, a quintet for clarinet and strings from 1967 influenced by British pastoral music and JMW Turner's Venetian canvases. The piece reveals the composer's mastery of intimate expression in three movements replete with nostalgic lyricism and lilting, seductive flights of fancy. The piece receives a tender and detailed account by clarinetist David Jones, violinists Netanel Draiblate and Eva Cappelletti Chao, viola player Philippe Chao and cellist Benjamin Capps. **Donald Rosenberg**

'The Chicago Recital'

Dupré Prelude and Fugue, Op 7 No 1 **R Laurin**
Three Short Studies, Op 68 **E Macmillan** Cortège
académique Mendelssohn A Midsummer Night's
Dream, Op 61 (excs, transcr Demers) **Reger**
Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue, Op 127
Tchaikovsky The Sleeping Beauty, Op 66 (excs,
 transcr Demers)
Isabelle Demers *org*

Acis © APL41752 (71' • DDD)

Recorded on the EM Skinner Opus 634
 organ of the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel,
 University of Chicago



Isabelle Demers is a Quebec-born organist who revels in the music she plays

and the sounds she can produce by way of pipes and air. Her new recording, 'The Chicago Recital', goes to glorious extremes, exploring the colouristic and expressive possibilities of the 1928 Ernest M Skinner organ known as Opus 634 at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. From the most delicate phrases to massive sonorities that shake ground and ears, the 8565-pipe Skinner comes across as a symphonic wonder, thanks to Demers's inspired hands, feet and musical acumen.

Her choice of repertoire has a lot to do with the recital's success. Demers performs works written specifically for organ as well as her own transcriptions of orchestral selections by Tchaikovsky and Mendelssohn. The latter may not convince anyone to abandon the original versions but Demers shows bountiful discernment in her choice of timbres to simulate the

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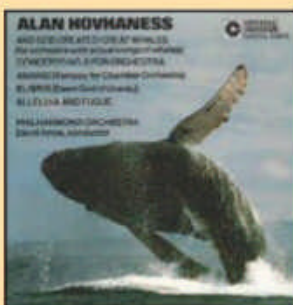
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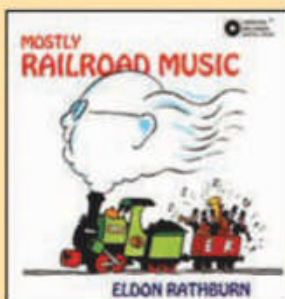
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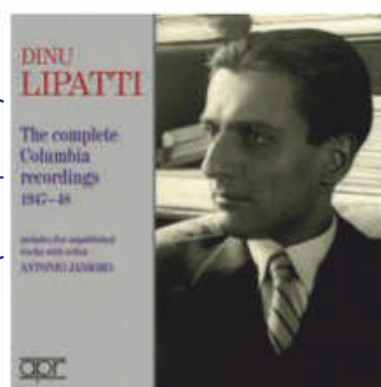
Magda Tagliaferro combined Brazilian fire with French finesse, qualities that she brought to repertoire from Mozart and Chopin to French composers of her day. Hahn dedicated his piano concerto to her, and also featured here is the premiere recording of Fauré's Ballade, as well as music by Mompou and Granados.



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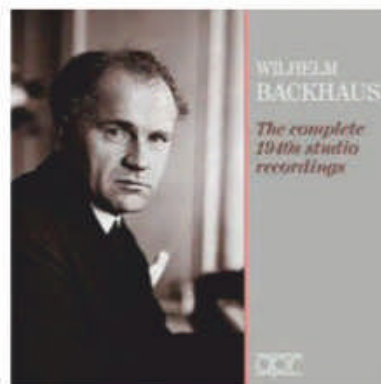
Her earliest recordings and Chopin, Liszt & Villa-Lobos. Aline van Barentzen was a child prodigy, admitted to the Paris Conservatoire at 9, where she later became a revered teacher. She made the premiere recordings of Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and Book 2 of Villa-Lobos's *Prole do bebê*.



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instruments and auras in Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* (scenes from Act 2) and Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Scherzo, slightly cumbersome, and Nocturne, tender and magical).

The most striking, even jolting piece here is Max Reger's Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue, Op 127, a tour de force of compositional skill and harmonic

adventure with fascinating sonic twists around every corner. It requires the services of an artist who is unafraid to tackle formidable structural and textural challenges. Demers meets them in a performance of virtuoso sensitivity and grandeur.

She applies the same shining musicality to the remaining works, from Ernest Macmillan's imperial *Cortège académique*

and Rachel Laurin's witty *Three Short Studies*, Op 68, including two delightful bird musings, to Marcel Dupré's exuberant Prelude and Fugue in B, Op 7 No 1. Acis captures these performances in vibrant sound: those who listen through speakers should expect their walls to vibrate when Demers and Skinner conspire with thunderous alacrity.

Donald Rosenberg

National Sawdust, Brooklyn

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 2015

Architects Bureau V Architecture; Arup

Capacity 200

The world is full of concert halls repurposed from industrial spaces, but how many can claim to be a former sawdust factory?

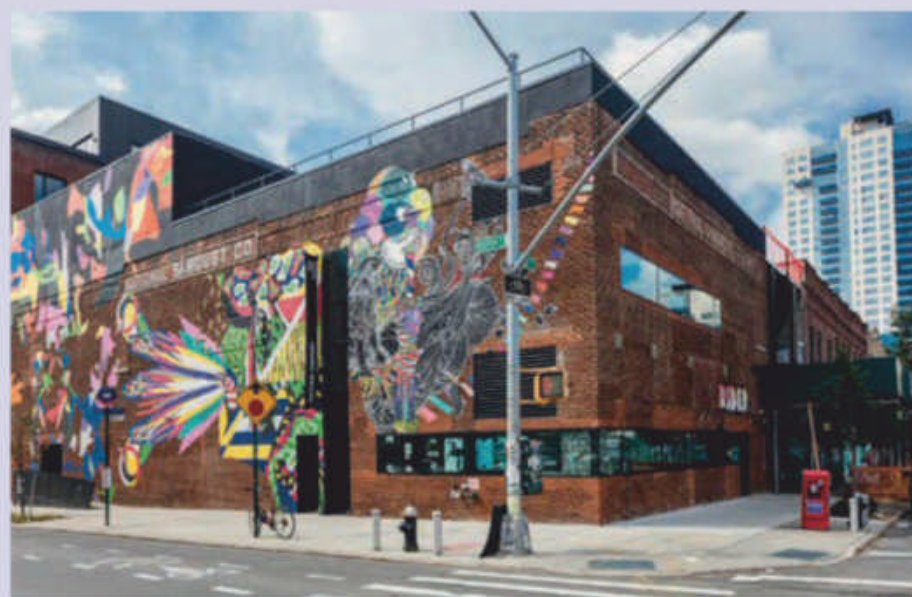
National Sawdust has become Brooklyn's new-music nerve centre in the five years since its October 2015 opening, hosting all manner of cross-genre performances, experimental opera stagings, training programmes for young composers and its own recording label. Composers of almost every sort find their way there, from the West Coast veteran iconoclast Terry Riley to more confrontational New Yorkers such as John Zorn.

The dark diagonal lines that frame the stage can be transformed by video technology into mirage-like environments, though traditional scenery has also been known to all but spill out into the seating area. Typically atypical, for example, was countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo's 2017 performance of Handel's serenata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* – a piece that wouldn't slot well into any conventional opera company, with Costanzo (who co-produced the event) vocally cross-dressing as a sea nymph. It's one of any number of projects that seemed impossible in that small space – until it wasn't.

The range of work is somewhat encapsulated by the releases on the National Sawdust Tracks label, which includes *Burn / Build* by the Brooklyn-based collective Miyamoto is Black Enough as well as the acclaimed David T Little/Royce Vavrek opera *Dog Days*, which is about cannibalism (among other things). One indication of the quality level is that when Simone Dinnerstein played Philip Glass piano études there, it was on a Bösendorfer.

National Sawdust's co-founders, composer Paola Prestini and philanthropist Kevin Dolan, always planned to produce as well as present events when the venue emerged from the then-shuttered National Sawdust Company that had been a going concern in the 1930s. Now the concert centre fits well into the modern Williamsburg district, where incongruity rules: among the young hipsters, one sees Hasidic families looking like they just walked out of 19th-century Lithuania; summertime Italian street fairs seem to exist in a 1940s time warp; bakeries sell Polish-language newspapers. Along the East River, the converted sugar factory that is Domino Park feels like something out of California with volleyball nets, a taco stand and good Wi-Fi.

The main drawback at National Sawdust is its 200-seat capacity. This translates into consistently sold-out houses for the 500 or so performances each year, though lots of music lovers are turned



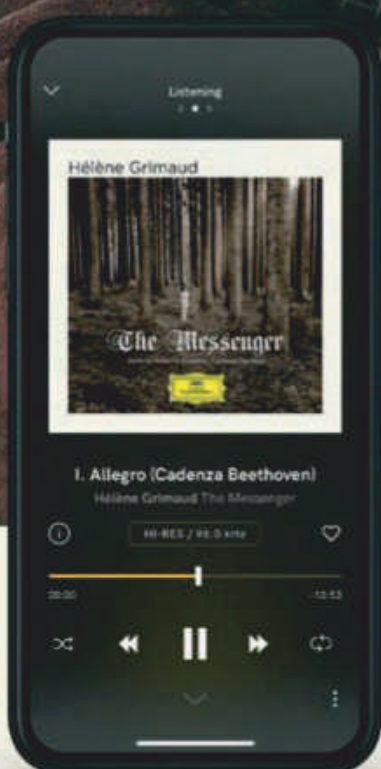
away. But those are exactly the people who stood to be reached during the Covid-19 lockdown: National Sawdust's Digital Discovery Festival had roughly two to four streamed events a week throughout the spring and summer of 2020, including improvisations by pianist Conrad Tao and masterclasses with mainstream opera stars such as Jamie Barton. Musicians were paid \$1000 for their home-produced performances (thanks to the Alphadyne Foundation) and offered technical training on how to look and sound good on camera. The main casualty in the lockdown was the *Log Journal*, the digital editorial site edited by the esteemed Steve Smith that was discontinued in March 2020.

Forthcoming is the New Works Commission, in which 20 composers are paid \$3000 for new works to be premiered starting in December, with mentoring from new-music performers such as the Jack Quartet and National Sawdust Ensemble. Concurrently, the New Works Composer Series throughout November has free streams dealing with practical matters, including recording techniques and intellectual property. In October the composer Ellen Reid held a session about her Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Prism* titled 'Unpacking the messy process of bringing ideas into the real world'. Also important is the annual Hildegard Composer Competition – named for the medieval abbess who was the first known woman composer – with a special outreach to transgender composers.

The common denominator in all of this is found in Prestini's frequent use of the word 'ecosystem'. She sees the larger picture; her own works have been presented in places such as Brooklyn's Prospect Park. 'It's not an artist's job to heal society,' she once said, 'but to voice the things they feel, see and experience. It's our job at National Sawdust to amplify their voices and give a stage to share their story.' **David Patrick Stearns**



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A LETTER FROM *Dallas*

Scott Cantrell reports from Texas on the inevitable consequences of the pandemic for the regional arts scene



By mid-March, as the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic became clear, the arts scene in the North Texas 'Metroplex' of Dallas, Fort Worth and surrounding cities totally shut down. For months thereafter, my main work as freelance classical music critic of *The Dallas Morning News* was reporting postponements and cancellations – soon extending to summer festivals where area musicians often perform and teach. Remarkably, as of October, both the Dallas and Fort Worth Symphony Orchestras were still paying their musicians, although administrative staffs – in other organisations as well – have been subjected to layoffs, furloughs and salary cuts. As elsewhere, the impact on freelance musicians has been devastating.

As of October 1, Texas had recorded 753,293 cases of Covid-19 infections and 15,703 deaths – and that's with still-inadequate testing. With business and restaurant restrictions loosening in the autumn, and with schools reopening, a dreaded second wave looms as a real possibility.

Dallas-Fort Worth musical organisations have adopted various strategies for maintaining connections with their audiences. Organisations, even smaller ones, have managed to produce some online audio-video content, and starting in September some live performances have been offered with smaller ensembles and audiences.

During the summer, Dallas Symphony Orchestra musicians eager for any performance opportunity began assembling in chamber ensembles to play outside patrons' homes. With video equipment added to the excellent audio facilities in the Meyerson Symphony Center, mini-concerts of chamber music and chamber-orchestra works were recorded and made available on the orchestra's website.

The 2020-21 season is the DSO's first with Fabio Luisi fully in place as music director, an appointment widely considered something of a coup. At the age of 61, with his international career including an acclaimed stretch as principal conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, Luisi is a mature musician clearly at the top of his game. So the DSO had extra impetus to make some kind of season possible.

While many, perhaps most, American orchestras cancelled concerts until at least the end of 2020, the DSO began reimagining an autumn season of shorter, intermission-less concerts, with a maximum of 40 musicians socially distanced on an extended Meyerson stage. Although most of the announced guest conductors and soloists were retained, programmes were rejigged for pieces that could work with smaller ensembles. In the 2000-seat hall, audiences, selected by lottery from existing subscribers, were initially limited to a masked and widely spaced 75, adding 25 for each following concert. String players wore masks; winds and

brass were separated by Plexiglas dividers. Most of the autumn programmes have been video recorded for subsequent online availability, at \$10 each. As of this writing, the future of concerts in December – especially Christmas concerts including the excellent Dallas Symphony Chorus – remains uncertain.

The Fort Worth Symphony grew into quite an accomplished orchestra during 20 years under music director Miguel Harth-Bedoya. But both he and the orchestra were ready for a change, and he stepped down in July. With potential successors booked as guest conductors of concerts that then had to be cancelled, and with the future of the 2020-21 season uncertain, the search has been put on hold.


Like the DSO, the FWSO reimagined an autumn 2020 season that could be performed with chamber-orchestra numbers and smaller audiences. But two weeks before the first concert, the

orchestra learnt that its acoustically excellent home, Bass Performance Hall, would remain closed until the end of the year. In a mad scramble, dates were booked in Will

Rogers Auditorium, part of an art deco entertainment and exhibition complex about half a mile from downtown. Sadly, the vast, drab space is acoustically disastrous for orchestral sound.

In the absence of live performance opportunities, both the Dallas and Fort Worth opera companies have been offering online recordings of recitals and selected past productions. The Dallas Opera cancelled the last three productions of its planned 2019-20 season and the first three planned for 2020-21. A spring 2021 season of four productions is planned starting in March: the premiere of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* by composer Joby Talbot and librettist Gene Scheer, plus *Don Carlo* (a semi-staged version), *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Tosca*.

Three months before Fort Worth Opera's planned spring 2020 festival – which, of course, had to be cancelled – general director Tuomas Hiltunen suddenly resigned. In September the company named Afton Battle his successor, with an announcement that henceforth the spring festival format would be replaced by main-season productions. The company has made new and archival performances available on its website but at present no upcoming live productions are listed.

The area's other biggest musical entity, the Cliburn, is postponing its planned 2021 International Piano Competition to 2022. This is the first postponement in the nearly 60-year history of the quadrennial contest, but between ongoing pandemic uncertainties and the competition's elaborate international as well as local logistics, there seemed to be no choice. The Cliburn is also an important presenter of concerts in Fort Worth; that season start has been delayed until January – subject, of course, to change. 

Audiences, selected by lottery from existing subscribers, were initially limited to a masked and widely spaced 75

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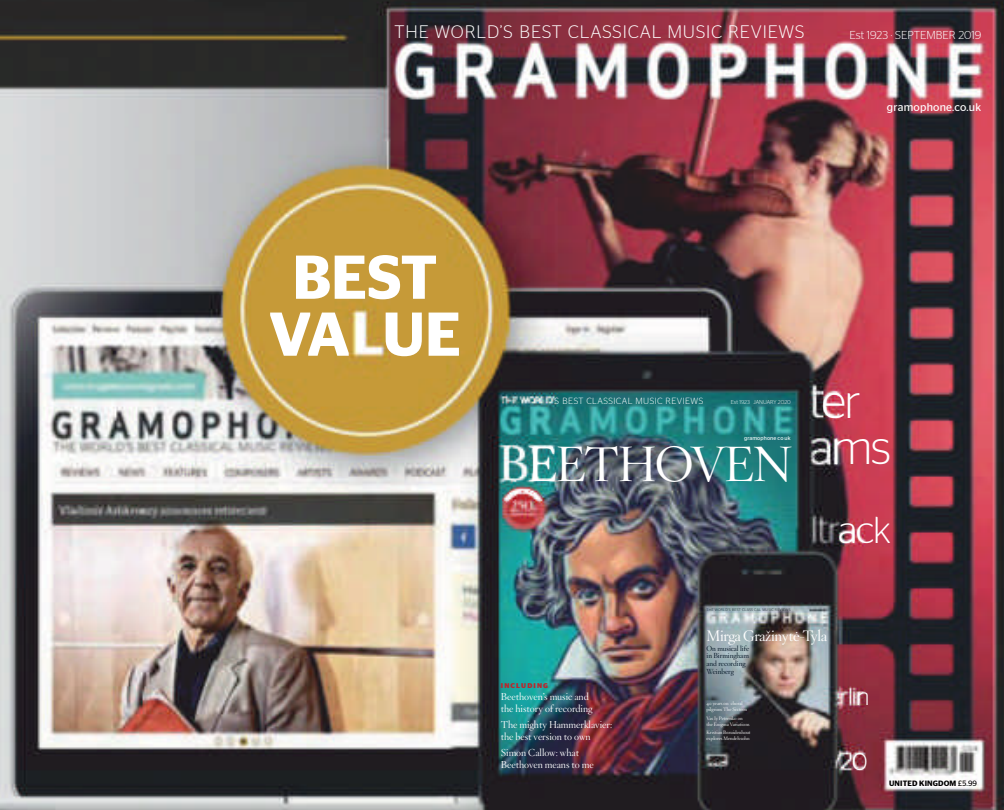
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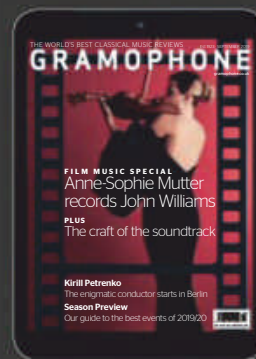
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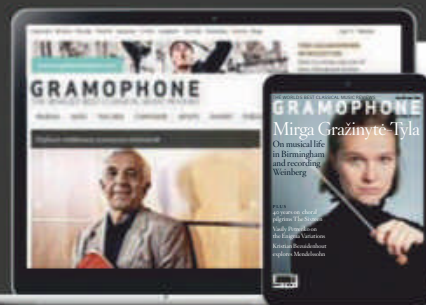
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Thoughts from our founder – 80 years on

Covid-19 and the associated restrictions may have led to increased separation, but sometimes hands can reach out across the decades to make surprising connections.

Last week I needed to scan an old copy of *Gramophone*, from July 1942. The war years are always a poignant presence among our bound volumes – the significantly thinner spines reflecting paper shortages and wider deprivations of the day, but there all the same, offering proud continuity and occasionally carrying correspondence from serving soldiers, grateful for links to art in unimaginable circumstances. I'm not, for one moment, equating the horrors of that global conflict with the challenges of our own time – the world is today united in fighting a common enemy – but turning to our founder Compton MacKenzie's opening editorial, I was still struck by some powerful parallels.

'I have just been spending a crowded five weeks in London,' he begins – the parallel immediately falling down a little given today's somewhat subdued city streets – 'my first visit for two years. Among innumerable impressions of every kind none was deeper than the impression made upon me by the vitality of the gramophone ... It is true to say that never since recorded music was made available has recorded music been so precious as it is today. So intense is this vitality of the gramophone that it is over-coming the most fantastic difficulties and obstacles in a way that those who are fully aware of those difficulties and obstacles still find hardly credible.'

The difficulties and obstacles facing artists and ensembles today are immense too, and so to all those



releasing recordings, streaming performances and making recording sessions happen – a heartfelt bravo. Warm summer months may have offered hope – or at least hints – of normality, but autumn's darkening days bring renewed restrictions, and just this week I've received several more notifications of cancelled seasons from organisations bowing to the inevitable. I've thus cherished live music where I've found it – church bells rung in a Covid-compliant manner, a little later the organ voluntary – but such moments are rare. And let us remember other genres too – spaced out seating might just about suit symphonic music, but if you usually perform to packed pubs or rock venues, these days have been bleaker still. So I'm with MacKenzie: never, not in my lifetime anyway, has recorded music felt quite so precious. Last month we held our annual *Gramophone* Awards online – and I urge you to watch if you aren't among the 320,000 who have already done so, where aside from hearing some fine speeches and beautiful music-making, you can enjoy simply celebrating and giving thanks for this glorious art form.

And one final parallel. Concluding his thought, Mackenzie said: 'This vitality is reflected in the support which our own paper receives. I find it impossible to express with sufficient warmth my appreciation of the spirit animating our readers and our advertisers'. Almost 80 years later I couldn't put it better myself, extending that to everyone, from artists, to those innovating in online areas that Mackenzie could never have foreseen, who all keep the spirit of both *Gramophone*, and the gramophone, burning so brightly.
martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'While writing about Josquin is always rewarding', says **IVAN MOODY** who interviews Peter Philips this

issue, 'having an excuse to listen through to The Tallis Scholars' benchmark recordings of the Masses made it particularly so this time.'



'With so much of her music still waiting to be recorded, Nicola LeFanu gets less attention than she deserves,'

says **HANNAH NEPILOVA** of this month's Contemporary Composer. 'So it was all the more satisfying piecing together a portrait of this intriguing, quietly daring composer.'



'It's funny how a person's public persona can be completely at odds with their private one. I never met John

Tavener, but I had an idea of who he was,' says **CHARLOTTE GARDNER**, 'one which was gloriously debunked by Steven Isserlis as we discussed their close friendship and his recording honouring it.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay
Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer)
Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
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Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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but really welcome in the catalogue"**
BBC Radio 3 CD Review

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value in rare gems from the past"**
Rob Cowan



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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



NIELSEN
Symphonies
Nos 1 & 2, 'The
Four Temperaments'
**Seattle Symphony
Orchestra /
Thomas Dausgaard**
Seattle Symphony
Media
► **ANDREW
MELLOR'S REVIEW
IS ON PAGE 32**

Two brilliant traversals of Nielsen's early symphonies, featuring some truly thrilling and perceptive playing from the Seattle Symphony Orchestra under conductor Thomas Dausgaard.



SIBELIUS
Symphonies Nos 1 & 3
**Royal Philharmonic
Orchestra /
Owain Arwel Hughes**
Rubicon

Sibelius's beguiling sound world is brought out with full force and beauty by Owain Arwel Hughes and the RPO on this splendid album from the Rubicon label.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



TAVENER No Longer
Mourn For Me
Steven Isserlis vc
**Philharmonia Orchestra
/ Omer Meir Wellber**
Hyperion

A deeply personal project from Steven Isserlis of music by his great friend Sir John Tavener – learn more about the moving story behind it in this month's feature.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



**'LONDON
CIRCA 1720'**
La Réveuse
Harmonia Mundi
Elegant music-making throughout from

these wonderfully collaborative musicians, sprightly and serene by turns, which vividly evokes a musical and historical period in time.

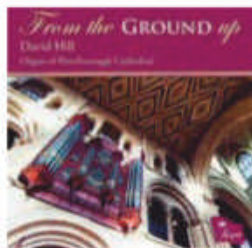
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



**BARTÓK. BRAHMS.
LISZT** Piano Works
Alexandre Kantorow pf
BIS
Pianist Alexandre Kantorow continues

his extraordinary progress with a further remarkable example of his virtuosity and artistry, showing both skill and sensitivity throughout this captivating programme.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



**'FROM THE
GROUND UP'**
David Hill org
Regent
A glorious exploration of the

Passacaglia across the eras from David Hill, gloriously performed (and recorded) on the resplendent-sounding organ of Peterborough Cathedral.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



JOSQUIN Masses
**The Tallis Scholars /
Peter Phillips**
Gimell
Journey's end: and what a journey. From

the *Gramophone* Award-winning opening album back in 1986, The Tallis Scholars' survey of Josquin's Masses finishes with an appropriately superb addition to the series.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



MAHLER 'Erinnerung'
Christiane Karg sop
Malcolm Martineau pf
Harmonia Mundi
An album of very beautiful Mahler-

singing from soprano Christiane Karg, joined throughout by stylish piano playing from Malcolm Martineau (and, intriguingly, the composer himself ...)

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



**'STURM UND DRANG,
VOL 2'**
**The Mozartists /
Ian Page**
Signum
Ian Page and

The Mozartists once again shine in Volume Two of their study of music associated with *Sturm und Drang* – thoughtful programming and excellent performances.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



ARNOLD
The Dancing Master
**Sols; BBC Concert
Orchestra /
John Andrews**
Resonus

A fascinating and unexpected slice of 20th-century British music-making – Malcolm Arnold's one-act comic opera performed with sparkling freshness.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



DVD/BLU-RAY
HENZE Der Prinz von Homburg
Sols; Stuttgart Opera / Cornelius Meister
Naxos
Henze's 1960 take on Heinrich von Kleist's early 19th-century play *Der Prinz von Homburg* is here given a thought-provoking and strong staging and performance.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
MAGDA TAGLIAFERRO
'The Complete 78rpm Solo and Concerto Recordings & Selected Chamber Recordings' APR
The complete 78rpm solo and concerto recordings of Brazilian-born pianist Magda Tagliaferro, excellently transferred and presented by the APR label.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**

FOR THE RECORD

Randall Goosby signs to Decca

Decca Classics has signed 24-year-old violinist Randall Goosby. His debut album, set for release next spring, will, according to a statement from the label, ‘journey across more than a century of African-American music for violin, tracing its roots in the spiritual through to the present day’, embracing composers including William Grant Still and Florence Price, plus newly commissioned music by composer and double bass player Xavier Foley.

Goosby, who grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, is a protégé of Itzhak Perlman, who arranged a full scholarship for Goosby to study with him at Juilliard. The young violinist paid tribute to his mentor at last month’s *Gramophone* Awards when Perlman received our Lifetime Achievement Award.

‘I’m so thrilled to be working with the Decca Classics team for the release of my debut album!’, said Goosby, whose achievements to date include being the youngest ever winner of the junior division of the prestigious Sphinx Competition, First Prize Winner in the 2018 Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York, and the first ever Robey Artist with Young Classical Artists Trust in London. ‘It’s a record label that has been home to some of my favourite artists and musical role models, and I’m delighted to be joining such an esteemed roster. For me, music has always been a way to inspire others. It’s part of my quest as an artist to amplify black voices in classical music, bringing heightened recognition to this incredible music.’



Perlman protégé Randall Goosby: joining Decca

Lahav Shani signs to Warners

Warner Classics has signed a multi-year agreement with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and its Chief Conductor Lahav Shani. The partnership begins with a release on November 27 of an all-Beethoven album, featuring the Piano Concerto No 4, which Shani directs from the keyboard, and Symphony No 7, and which was recorded in October last year.

The 31-year-old Israeli artist succeeded Yannick Nézet-Séguin at the ensemble in 2018/19 season and in March this year extended his contact there until 2026. He expressed his delight at being able to ‘share our music-making with a wider international audience through our recordings. At a time when international touring is impossible it seems particularly important to do this’.



Academic and agency alliance

The San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM) has announced an alliance with the artist management company Opus 3 that will create ‘a new operating model committed to artistic excellence from the training of young musicians to the premier representation of professional artists around the world’. It’s the first time a non-profit, education establishment has bought a for-profit management company.

The announcement was made at the same time as the opening of the SFCM’s \$200 million Bowes Center, a state-of-the-art residence, training and performance facility for students and professional artists in San Francisco’s Civic Center district.

Both SFCM and Opus 3 – which represents artists including Yo-Yo Ma, Marin Alsop, and Daniel Barenboim – will continue

as autonomous organisations. Among the initiatives it is hoped will emerge from the alliance will be commissions, recordings and opportunities to experiment artistically, and that students studying at SFCM and interested in an arts management career will have internship opportunities with Opus 3 Artists.

Nelsons extends his positions

Andris Nelsons has affirmed his commitment to his two world-leading ensembles by signing extensions with both the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester.

The Boston contract, where Nelsons became Music Director in 2014, will now run for an additional three years through to the 2024-25 season, while that in Leipzig (where Nelsons has been Chief Conductor since 2017) now runs until 2027. Both announcements were made simultaneously, at which it was also confirmed that an alliance between the organisations – covering joint commissions, education and residencies – will also continue. Both partnerships were swiftly acclaimed – not least in these pages – for their music-making. A Shostakovich Symphony No 10 in Boston won the Orchestral category in our 2016 Awards – ‘one of the finest I have ever heard of this great piece,’ wrote Edward Seckerson – while, from Leipzig, a Bruckner Symphony No 3 the following year was praised by Christian Hoskins, who wrote that ‘the attention to detail is especially impressive’. Both albums were issued by DG.



PHOTOGRAPHY: KAUPU KIKKAS, MARCO BORGGREVE

OAE launches new online player

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment has launched a new digital platform. Rather than simply offer concert recordings, OAE Player will offer performances and programmes created specifically for an online audience, many filmed over the past summer with scripts written and music chosen by the musicians.



The OAE: online creativity

Content will initially focus on *The Edge of Reason*, a theme exploring the golden age of science and philosophy that gave the ensemble its name, and which was to have underpinned the current season prior to Covid cancellations.

An early addition to the Player will be a performance of Bach's Cantata BWV82 directed by baritone Roderick Williams and featuring soprano Rowan Pierce, an alumnus of the Orchestra's 'Rising Stars' singers scheme. Venues used for other films include the Fitzrovia Chapel, an ornate Gothic Revival chapel that once

formed part of Middlesex Hospital, and the Asylum Chapel in south London, in which the OAE recreated Don Giovanni's palace party. Some programmes will offer a quirky spin – one series set to appear at a later date on the Player will be 'Haydn Under the Knife', in which OAE musicians gather in London's Old Operating Theatre and dissect Haydn's lesser-known quartets to explore their brilliance.

The videos will be available on either a pay-as-you-view basis or via an annual pass costing £99.

The Player follows other recent initiatives by the OAE exploring different ways to relate to audiences. Earlier this autumn, it took up permanent residency at Acland Burghley secondary school – the first of its type for a British orchestra – where it is working with GCSE dance students to choreograph and record a project series for the OAE Player.

ONE TO WATCH

Nathan Meltzer Violin

The American violinist Nathan Meltzer studied at Juilliard with Itzhak Perlman and Li Lin, and in 2017 became the youngest winner of the Windsor Festival International String Competition at the age of 16. Part of his prize was to make a recording for Champs Hill Records, an album that has just been released (and will be reviewed next issue) containing music by Bach, Bartók, Szymanowski, Wieniawski and a stunning account of Franck's oft-recorded Violin Sonata. For many this will be their first encounter with his playing. It won't be the last.

Still only 20, Meltzer plays a 1734 Stradivarius that was previously owned by the American-Polish violinist Roman Totenberg, before it was stolen in 1980 and resurfaced only after Totenberg's death. Totenberg's family were thrilled that the instrument's recovery meant that its gorgeous voice could be heard once again in the hands of another great artist. The instrument is now on long-term loan to Meltzer, whose debut album is titled 'To Roman Totenberg' in honour of the older violinist's memory and in acknowledgement of the importance of this



instrument to the youngster's fledgling career. Meltzer draws from it a hugely cultivated sound, with a sweetness to his tone and gorgeously shaped legato lines. As with his teacher Itzhak Perlman, Meltzer's technique is of the sort that rarely draws attention to itself but enables a full expressive command of whatever he is playing. It is surely only a matter of time before a larger record label snaps him up.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

The *Gramophone* Podcast series continues in captivating style with revealing interviews with conductor Alexandre Bloch, who was appointed Music Director of the Orchestre National de Lille in 2016 and has made a huge impact on the music-making in the city; the Director of the Academy of Ancient Music, Richard Egarr, on his new recording of Dussek's *Messe Solennelle* on the orchestra's own label; Anna Lapwood, Director of Music at Pembroke College, Cambridge on the college's new album 'All Things Are Quite



Anna Clyne appears on the Gramophone Podcast

Silent'; and composer Anna Clyne who discusses her new album 'Mythologies', which includes various orchestral works recorded by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and conductors Marin Alsop, Sakari Oramo, Andrew Litton and André de Ridder.

Blogs

Colin Currie introduces Kalevi Aho's new percussion concerto and pianist Simon Callaghan explains why a complete survey of Dyson's piano works is long overdue.

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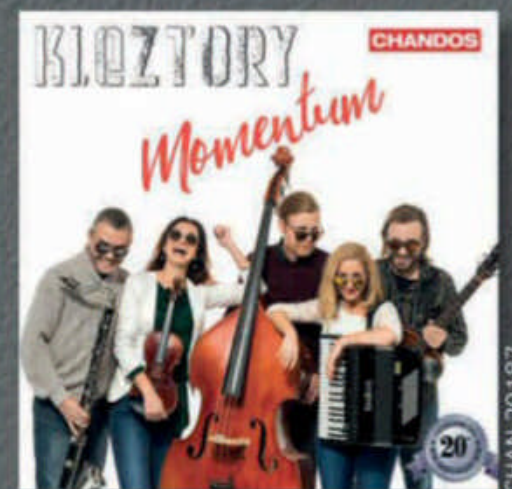
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Claudia Barainsky | John Bradbury
BBC Philharmonic | Omer Meir Wellber

The BBC Philharmonic and their new chief conductor, Omer Meir Wellber, turn to the unjustly neglected music of Paul Ben-Haim for Wellber's debut Chandos recording.

MOMENTUM

Klezstory

The trail-blazing Quebecois klezmer band Klezstory celebrates its 20th anniversary with its sixth album, featuring a mix of traditional tunes and new compositions.

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

DELIBES

BALLET SUITES

Royal Scottish National Orchestra | Neeme Järvi

Neeme Järvi returns to the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for a dazzling album of suites from the ballets *Sylvia*, *La Source*, and *Coppélia* by Delibes.

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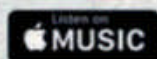
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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Gigue

Richard Wigmore on the dance that delighted Europe

The history of the gigue – the bouncy, feel-good send-off in so many

Baroque suites – is one of European cross-pollination. The dance's name ('jig' in English, *giga* in Italian) probably derives from the Old French *giguer* (to leap or frolic). Long before the French adopted it, the jig flourished in the British Isles, danced both by aristocrats and on village greens. It quickly acquired bawdy associations, not least in Scotland. In *Much Ado about Nothing* Beatrice says the first stage of wooing is 'hot and hasty, like a Scottish jigge'. In Ireland the jig became the national dance, lustily accompanied by pipe and fiddle.

Around 1600 the dance began to appear in keyboard collections such as the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. Half a century later it was exported to France by Jacques Gautier, former lutenist at Charles I's court, and given a Gallic makeover. Danced by the social elite, the gigue became more refined, characterised by gracefully skipping (*sautillant*) rhythms. Away from the ballroom, it acquired extra contrapuntal sophistication in the harpsichord



In Ireland, the energetic jig became the national dance

suites of Jean-Henri d'Anglebert and Lully's ballets for Versailles.

Meanwhile the Italians were cultivating their own brand of the dance: faster and racier, in 6/8 or 12/8 time, with regular four- or eight-bar phrases. Ever receptive to Latin influences, German composers used both the French- and Italian-style gigue in their suites. With its moderate pacing and sharply pointed rhythms, the gigue in Bach's C minor French Suite is unmistakably Gallic; so is the rhythmically intricate fugal gigue in the D minor Suite.

More often, though, Bach's giges, like Handel's, are in the Italian style. A famous example is the rollicking Gigue from the Third Orchestral Suite. Most thrilling of all is the Giga from the B flat keyboard Partita, with its hand-crossings and onward sweep.

The gigue's influence lingered on into the Classical period. The zesty finales of many a Haydn symphony are written against the background of the Italian *giga*. The dance could also evoke the chase, as in the opening Allegro of Mozart's *Hunt* Quartet, K458.

After Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony, whose opening captures the *giga*'s bounce and brio, the gigue lived on as parody, pastiche or nostalgic/ironic reminiscence. Nostalgia is tinged with despair in the 'Giges' from Debussy's *Images*, while in the 1920s, Schoenberg gave the Baroque dance the full 12-tone treatment in his Suites Opp 25 and 29. **G**

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Alec Frank-Gemmill on the horn he borrowed from the Brain family

“I've played the Brahms Trio (1865) on the modern horn as much as any piece I've ever played. I've played it on the natural horn, too. But even when I've nailed it, I've never felt like I was doing it justice. Then I encountered Aubrey Brain's horn, currently in possession of the Brain family and lent to me for my recording by kind permission of the Royal Academy of Music and Tina Brain (Aubrey's granddaughter and Dennis Brain's niece).

One of the most famous Horn Trio recordings, from 1933, is with Aubrey Brain, Adolph Busch and Rudolf Serkin – and Brain is playing this very horn. My intention was never to copy Brain but to be inspired by his instrument – it produced exactly the right warm but soft sound I was after. And, indeed, I found that it allowed me to express myself musically, how and when I wanted to.

There are strict followers of historical performance practice who refuse to listen to the Horn Trio unless it is played on the natural (valveless) horn. And it's true that Brahms favoured the 'Waldhorn' over the horn with valves. But it's important to remember that in Germany in the 1860s, the valve horn was heavier and louder than the Waldhorn. What Brahms therefore liked about the Waldhorn – the 'horn of the forest' – was its ability to invite us into a mysterious, romantic sound world. It was specifically the softer, more atmospheric sound he was drawn to, not so much the 'stopped' sound of the natural horn.

Nowadays, the Trio frequently gets recorded on the natural horn, so the sound has lost its old-fashioned mystique – and too often the



hand-stopping can sound like a series of special effects. Simply dispensing with valves and playing quietly won't therefore bring us back to Brahms's original concept.

As a player who dabbles in different styles of playing, I decided that, with my recording, I didn't want to be a part of either the modern tradition or the natural horn tradition. I guess I wanted to have my cake and eat it, and this horn allows me to do that. Dating from c1871-76 (so only a decade after the Trio was written), it was built by Raoux-Labbaye, the foremost horn-maker based in Paris. Conceived as a natural horn, it was then imported to London and had a piston-valve section added by William Brown. Perhaps someone wanted the body to be from Paris because the quality was known to be so

good, whereas London was known for making better valves.

The horn has a surprisingly lush, albeit not too loud sound. If you're playing chamber music, it still has a natural-horn quality – you can play 'loudly' but without drowning out your colleagues and the sound becomes more intense and exciting. The intonation is tricky, but on the natural horn even hitting all the notes would have been difficult!

It's a brilliant instrument – it's the perfect halfway point between a natural horn and a modern horn. I'll probably be ostracised by people looking either for total authenticity or an ultra-modern sound, but I chose the instrument because it inspired me. Brahms wanted a sense of poetry in this Trio – and this horn has plenty of that! ”

Alec Frank-Gemmill's Brahms Trio recording is reviewed next issue

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1932

Home Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House

Music Director Designate Simone Young (2022)

Founding Music Director Eugene Goossens

It's hard to say when the Sydney Symphony Orchestra was born. The name was first used in 1905 at the formation of an ensemble for Paderewski's visit to the city. It wasn't until 1932 that Sydney had a permanent orchestra up and running, under the auspices of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Five years later ABC adopted the alliterative title.

During World War II, Australia's fortuitous geography brought countless conductors to the ensemble who should have been busy in Europe. One of them, Eugene Ormandy, recommended an increase in players to 82 that was realised in 1946, the same year Eugene Goossens first visited, leading to his appointment as chief conductor from 1947. Goossens vowed to make the orchestra 'one of the six best in the world' and had a good go, bringing friends Klemperer and Barbirolli to Sydney before a sexual storm-in-a-teacup forced his resignation.

Since 1973, the SSO has played at the world's most iconic building, the opera house Goossens himself dreamed-up. Dutchman Willem van Otterloo presided over the move, a European tour and recordings that started to make their way into *Gramophone*. A big figure in the orchestra's modernisation was Paul Keating, the Australian Prime Minister who would claim to have restructured his country's economy under the influence of Mahler and Bruckner.

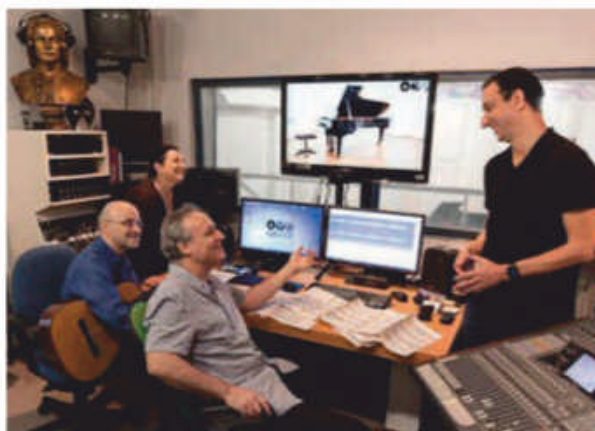


Keating saw the SSO as an ambassador for Australia. Sure enough, in the decades that followed, now independent from the ABC, it looked like a slick international ensemble and started to sound like one too. Edo de Waart instilled a diet of Mahler and Wagner, with his successor Vladimir Ashkenazy's recording a live Mahler cycle on a plush own-label that prompted much discussion. Three decades of *Gramophone* reviews, in repertoire from Tchaikovsky to Carl Vine and labels from Chandos to Exton, speak of progressively refining technique. By 2012 we read of 'exhilarating vigour and deftness' and in 2016, our man down under William Yeoman wrote of the SSO playing with 'the energy and precision for which it has become world-renowned.' In this new decade, the orchestra stands poised on the brink of opportunity. It will move back into its refurbished concert hall and, in Simone Young, see the arrival of the first fully experienced, interpretation-led leader since the tenure of its own former oboist Charles Mackerras. And both were born in Sydney. **Andrew Mellor**

Unique Debussy recording project released on Naxos

Next month, exactly 100 years after the project was first unveiled, a recording of *Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy* is being released in its most complete format to date. Out digitally on Naxos, with the physical release to follow early next year, pianist Tomer Lev's labour of love brings together some of Israel's finest musicians to perform the 10 works commissioned by Paris magazine *La Revue Musicale* in tribute to Debussy and published in its December 1920 edition.

When it first announced its intention for 10 works to be integrated into a special cycle, and for the score to be added as an appendix to its memorial issue (illustrated by post-Impressionist painter Raoul Dufy), the response was unprecedented. The final line-up of composers – including Stravinsky, Bartók, Ravel, Satie, Dukas and Falla – was a clear reflection of the respect the classical music world had for Debussy. The resulting works were typical of each composer's style, yet many represented the prevalent styles of post-First World War Paris and, in that sense, evoked Debussy's own aesthetic outlook.



Tomer Lev (centre) plays music in memory of Debussy

With no clear parameters with regard to instrumentation the collection was, and remains, hugely diverse. Which perhaps goes some way to explain why recordings of the complete cycle – which demands a piano, soprano, guitar, violin, cello, orchestra and conductor – have been few and far between. But now, with help from his colleagues at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, of which he is Director, Tomer Lev has recorded all 10 works in their original instrumentation (notwithstanding the final chorale

Stravinsky took from his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, submitted as a piano arrangement but performed here in its orchestral version because, says Lev, 'I have always believed that is what Stravinsky had in mind'). For Lev, realising such a long-held ambition – which started back in 1992, when he tracked down that commemorative issue of *La Revue Musicale* in a New York Public Library – it is a dream come true. 'With the digital release issued 100 years to the very month since that special edition was published, I have finally reached the end of the road of discovery,' he said.

FROM WHERE I SIT

It's special to be equally at home in the West End and at Glyndebourne, says Edward Seckerson




Among the many treasured recordings that I have found refuge in during a spring, summer and autumn of discontent for live music and theatre this year a souvenir DVD of the fabulous 2005 David McVicar staging of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* at Glyndebourne brought back especially potent memories of an unforgettable opening night where opulence was all around and a new stage star was born in Danielle de Niese. I remember writing my notice for *The Independent* and describing this sexy, showbizzy Cleopatra as (and literary finesse had already deserted me) 'a complete knock-out'. If singing was about mind, body and spirit this lady had it in abundance. All the elements – voice, musicality, theatricality, physicality – were in alignment. She belonged on a stage.

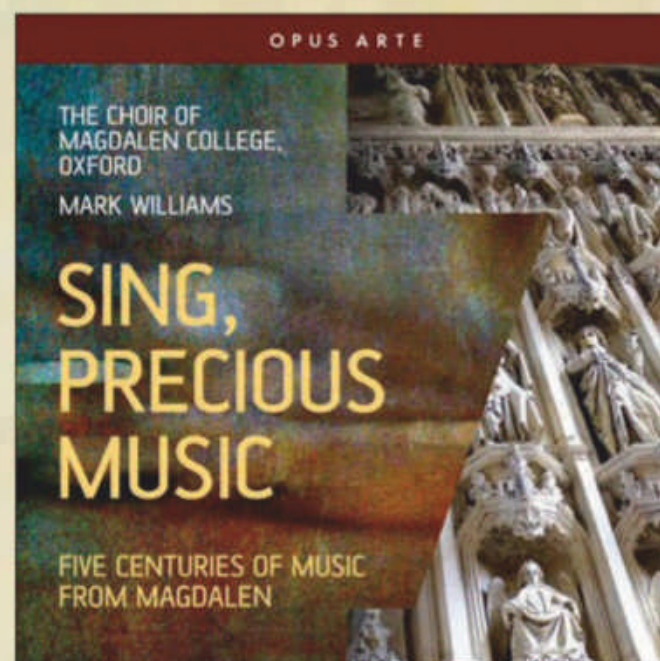
I put it recently to both de Niese and Sarah Connolly (her Caesar) in a couple of audio podcasts that this was a production in which everyone belonged on that stage. Connolly recalls the first rehearsal where McVicar had placed a single director's chair in the rehearsal space and upon her entrance she had instinctively gravitated to it and sat down – because important people sat while everyone else stood. That was her performance right there.

De Niese had to play catch-up as, believe it or not, she was a late replacement for Cleopatra. Career-defining performances don't usually start that way – though if you think about it Cleopatra's beauty and superstardom are talking points long before we actually set eyes upon her. When I set eyes upon de Niese something else struck me about her – and that was an indefinable air of the West End and Broadway. So it came as no surprise to learn that she was weaned on musical genre-hopping and at seven she had auditioned for the Young Cosette in the Australian premiere of *Les Misérables*.

Last summer she pulled off an astonishing 'double' alternating Massenet's *Cendrillon* (conducted by John Wilson) at Glyndebourne and Aldonza in Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion's *Man of La Mancha* at ENO. Both require operatic reach and a natural stage magnetism but the vocal production requires significant adjustments, shifting the centre of gravity of the voice to achieve more of a 'chest dominated' mix. When you have a healthy legit soprano as your foundation (and de Niese has steered clear of insane offers like *Aida* which one legendary director tried to lure her with) such adjustments are less of an issue. Look at Broadway leading ladies like Kelli O'Hara, Laura Benanti, Audra McDonald – all legit sopranos and then some. The other thing is a natural ability to connect with the vernacular of the text. Dawn Upshaw is a shining example of someone who could do that instinctively.

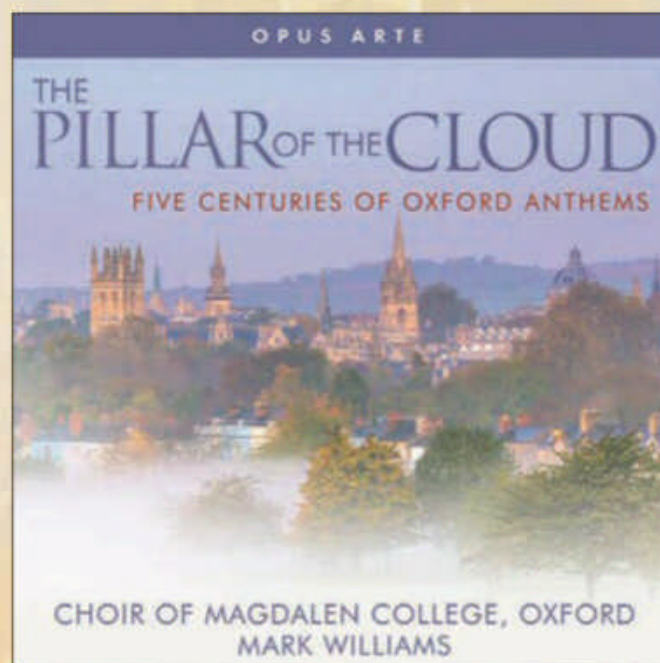
De Niese is drawn to all branches of the musical stage and clearly longs to alternate Handel, Mozart, and the *bel canto* repertoire with the likes of Jason Robert Brown (*The Bridges of Madison County* has been suggested) and Adam Guettel (she looked on as Renée Fleming gave her Margaret Johnson from *The Light in the Piazza* last year). But now she is lady of the manor at Glyndebourne could this be the time that Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella* finally makes it there? John Wilson is aching to do it. 

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Usbering in A NEW CHAPTER

As Paavo Järvi settles into his role as Chief Conductor of Zurich's Tonhalle Orchestra, James Jolly talks Tchaikovsky and more with one of the busiest and most in-demand conductors of today

We're sitting in the kitchen of Paavo Järvi's west London flat in early September, two days after Simon

Rattle's BBC Prom with the LSO in an empty Royal Albert Hall. Typically generous and knowledgeable about the work of his colleagues, Paavo – everyone calls him Paavo, which not only confirms his refreshing lack of ego but avoids any ambiguity given his rich family connections – is bubbling with enthusiasm. 'What brilliant programming – Gabrieli, Beethoven's *Moonlight*, György Kurtág, Thomas Adès and Vaughan Williams: that's the kind of thinking I love to encounter in the concert hall. Amazing! I was glued to the television.' Suddenly, he jumps to his feet – he wants to show me how he got through the weeks of lockdown. I follow as he throws open a door. 'It may not be much,' he says, as we look down on a modest bamboo-edged garden, 'but I spent so much time here, just thinking, during the summer when the weather was really beautiful.'

'As in chamber music, I shape phrases, he shapes phrases back. Paavo's conducting is alive, really alive!' – Steven Isserlis, cellist

It's hard to imagine such a workaholic as Paavo ever staying in one place for weeks at a time with no conducting, but, as was the case for a lot of musicians, lockdown provided time for reflection – albeit a reflection niggled by pain at the perilous situation of the players he usually works with on a weekly basis. His London flat, which he's owned for many years, is usually little more than a bolthole, a place where he keeps his substantial library of scores and orchestral parts, and where he spends the occasional night when he's

not with his regular orchestral partners in Bremen (the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, of which he's Artistic Director), Tokyo (NHK Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor) or Estonia (where he's Artistic Advisor of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and head of the Estonian Festival Orchestra, of which he's the immensely proud founder), or making one of his numerous guest appearances with the likes of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Orchestre de Paris (whose Music Director he was until 2016). And now there's his association with Zurich, where he's just ended what was a decidedly on-off first season as Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Tonhalle Orchestra.

Paavo is rather like one of those people who remains the best of friends with his exes – he doesn't believe in messy musical divorces. Viewed from the outside, his is an elegantly managed career, each new appointment taking him a few steps higher in the profession. 'There's often a natural cycle, where things have almost organically reached the end of some sort of a road, and it's not negative,' he reflects, in his slow, measured way. 'It's not a personal thing. It's a logical, organic evolution. If you look at the orchestras that I have been with, I'm nearly always now a principal guest or laureate or something, because the relationship evolves into something else. And for the musicians, too: if you have 10 years of looking at the same face, I think it can get tiring. And there's nothing worse than somebody overstaying their welcome, like a guest who doesn't leave!' Not for nothing, then, is he Conductor Laureate of the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Laureate of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

As posts have come and gone in Cincinnati, Paris, Frankfurt and Tokyo (from which he steps down in 2022), one ensemble remains a constant: the Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, with which Paavo has been associated for 25 years. What keeps things fresh in this north German city, he explains, is that it's a project-based partnership. 'It's not like I'm

there every Monday and doing the subscription concerts. They don't have any of that stuff. We do a project and then we take the project on the road, and then I don't go there again for a while. Then I come back again and

do another very intense project, and then I leave.'

One musician who has performed and recorded with Paavo in Bremen, Frankfurt and London is the cellist Steven Isserlis, who is an undoubted fan. 'Paavo's got a wonderfully clear technique to start with; he's one of the few conductors whose every beat I can follow. It's very natural conducting. And he's so calm as a collaborative artist – there's no panic about him. He does it as chamber music, which is great: I shape phrases, he shapes phrases back – his conducting is alive, really alive! He's full of ideas but allows the players to play – they love to play for him because he lets them express themselves. He keeps a tight grip, but he's not a control freak. And he enjoys it – his enjoyment is infectious. There's no ego clash with him, so I can talk directly to the orchestra at times; then he'll talk to them. So we sort of do it together, and I love that. And he's still growing as a conductor, he's learning new works, and he's getting deeper and deeper into the great 19th-century German repertoire.' I'm sure a similar response would have come had I spoken to Christian Tetzlaff, Viktoria Mullova, Lars Vogt, Lisa Batiashvili and his many other regular concerto partners.

Zurich's Tonhalle Orchestra – which, like Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, takes its name from its home – has a distinguished history that dates back to 1868. It has



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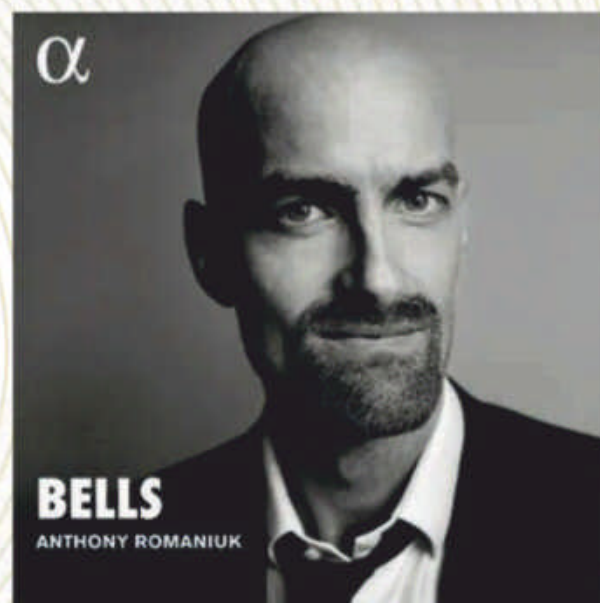


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Recording sessions for the new Tchaikovsky set: 'The Tonhalle don't have this Tchaikovsky tradition like in Russia,' says Paavo. 'They were discovering every moment'

boasted some fine chief conductors including Volkmar Andreae, Hans Rosbaud, Rudolf Kempe and Charles Dutoit. But the one who proved most transformative was the American David Zinman, who was in charge from 1995 to 2014. Paavo is quick to pay tribute to his predecessor-but-one. 'The Tonhalle is a hidden gem, in a way. I think it's really one of the great orchestras of the world – and I've conducted all of them. Somehow, they're at a place where they can just blossom. As far as the musicianship is concerned, it's real high-quality playing. I know very few orchestras like this. And why? Because Zinman has been a fantastic builder. He spent a lot of time with the orchestra and did things like Beethoven symphonies that are important to an orchestra's health. He wasn't just doing *Fountains of Rome* every other day. We did Mahler's Fifth with them on tour and I just couldn't believe how inside-out they know this piece, or how well they know a Brahms symphony ... This kind of thing really shows the basic – the very basic – level of the orchestra. And they're very responsive. It's a relationship. We speak the same language.'

Everything was in place for a suitably celebratory first season in Zurich, and then Covid-19 struck. 'All these amazing things were planned – we were coming to the Proms, to the Elbphilharmonie, and so on. They were all cancelled, of course, but that happened to everybody.' In terms of recording projects, a set of the complete Tchaikovsky symphonies was to have been released by Alpha; but changes had to be made. 'We were supposed to be getting the entire box-set out in one go,' Paavo explains, 'but then, just on the morning of the final concert, which would have been recorded for the completion of the set, somebody tested positive in the orchestra. The rehearsals were done, I even have a recording of the run-through from the dress rehearsal.' And so, for now, we have just the Fifth Symphony and *Francesca da Rimini*, while the complete box will emerge to mark the start of the 2021-22 season.

One person who has been watching Paavo's career for many years is the Tonhalle's Executive Director, Ilona Schmiel. A few jobs ago, she was running Bremen's concert hall Die Glocke, where the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen plays. When, in 2004, she became the Artistic Director and Manager of the Beethovenfest Bonn, it was one of the first groups she sought out to play all the Beethoven symphonies. A bright light in Germany's musical life, Schmiel moved to Switzerland in

2014 to head up the Tonhalle-Gesellschaft Zürich, which runs not only the orchestra but also the orchestra's home (as well as looking after its temporary venue, Tonhalle Maag, until the orchestra can return to the lakeside Tonhalle proper at the start of the 2021-22 season when major renovations are complete). 'When I arrived,' she recalls, 'I was also responsible for the guest conductors. Of course, I immediately put Paavo on the list as a priority. In December 2016 he conducted the orchestra for only the second or third time ever and they just clicked. He conducted Schumann's Third Symphony, and it was a bit like coming home for me as I sat there in the concert hall. He was amazed by the work of the orchestra and their sound, and how fast they got the flexibility he needs when he conducts. It was also about that time that we were starting to see who might be the successor to Lionel Bringuier. The timing was perfect.'

Paavo's credentials for the post couldn't have been better: he has the experience, he has a wonderful technique (is there a more elegant conductor on the podium today?), he has a vast repertoire but is also

very strong when it comes to the core Germanic works, and he has the flexibility that comes from working with chamber-sized ensembles (the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie in its 'basic' configuration) as well as full-sized symphony orchestras. And the relationship was two-way, as Schmiel points out: 'The orchestra was absolutely at the right moment to realise what they were getting. They responded to so many of his ideas and they found something fulfilling together. It's like a journey. Paavo has a wonderful curiosity and he looks outside the box – and that's something that's so important, especially now. We have to be so careful how we develop orchestras and cultural institutions and how we make them fit for the future.'

This summer, Schmiel recalls, 'the most important thing for us to do was to perform. In the middle of June, when the first flight was allowed from the UK to Zurich, I called Paavo and said, "You have to come," and he said, "I will be there." I picked him up from the airport and the next morning, June 16, we had our first rehearsal under totally new circumstances – social distancing on stage and all that stuff. What was great was that Paavo suggested some very unusual repertoire for this orchestra: Dvořák and Richard Strauss serenades, Honegger's Second Symphony, Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks* and so on – and it really brought everyone together. Now we have more than 75 musicians on stage again and so we need to be careful,

'He has a wonderful curiosity, looking outside the box. That's important, especially now' – Ilona Schmiel, Tonhalle Executive Director



Top: Tonhalle Maag, September 2020; bottom: with Tonhalle architect Elisabeth Boesch

but also confident and comfortable. But we have to play, and we have to perform. And we have to show that culture is essential in these times and that's why we need a strong partnership to get this message across to the politicians and civic leaders.'

As to how Paavo sees his role as a conductor, his answer is one of the most neatly expressed I've heard. 'Everybody has to find the relationship that works and then really make the most of it. Being loved everywhere is an unnecessary pursuit – it's not in the job description to be loved. If a conductor is afraid to make any corrections because they somehow fear they would be misunderstood or not invited back (which of course often happens), that's simply fruitless. A good conductor is someone who goes to an orchestra, and as a result the orchestra plays better and develops, and he or she leaves a better orchestra behind.'

Paavo is – and it hardly needs pointing out to *Gramophone* readers – a son of Neeme Järvi, and followed his father into the profession with never a thought that he might do anything else. But he isn't just part of a family of musicians; he is part of a family of passionate record enthusiasts. They didn't only listen voraciously to the classics, they explored the byways (and the byways of the byways) with a hunger that neither Neeme nor Paavo nor his younger brother Kristjan have shrugged off. There are very few composers with whom they are unfamiliar – the breadth of Neeme's repertoire (and recorded catalogue) is legendary; and Paavo shares that same passion for exploring what happens between the peaks of the mountain range that is classical orchestral music.

In the last issue of *Gramophone*, Paavo's DG album of the four Franz Schmidt symphonies was chosen as Recording of the Month, and this project is typical of his approach to music: he doesn't want to cherry-pick a composer's output, he wants to embrace the lot. 'What happens when you conduct more than one symphony – and I mean not just doing it once, but really getting to know those pieces – is that you get into the world of that composer. And that changes the way you do the next symphony. If I only did Beethoven's Fifth Symphony but did not know the Fourth or Third or First, I probably would be OK but I wouldn't be seeing the whole picture. I know conductors who have conducted only one Beethoven symphony, or maybe two. Can you imagine a violinist who plays the Sibelius Concerto but has never heard any other music by Sibelius, and whose only reference for Sibelius is the Heifetz or the Oistrakh recording? You can tell by the way they play it that they haven't heard another note of Sibelius! If you want to know something about Sibelius, you must know his symphonies. And you should know *Kullervo* – so much of what would follow is already there. If you learn *Kullervo*, and you really know it, and you really like it, and you can hum along, you can perform a Sibelius Violin Concerto that sounds different. Listen to Pekka Kuusisto playing it and it's different because he knows the rest of the Sibelius output. He knows when it's folk music, when it's not, when it's a kind of quotation from an old theme, and when it's not.'

The Schmidt symphonies, hardly everyday fare for any conductor, are a perfect example of this passion for completism. 'My father, when he was a lot younger, met a Slovak conductor who was very old. His name was L'udovít Rajter, a close friend of Schmidt. They went to his house, and he gave some Schmidt scores to my father, and my father got really excited about the music. And, of course, he's recorded them as well, and I grew up loving that music. It's so dramatic and it's so, kind of, "saturated". It's the world of Mahler's Vienna but at the point where there's nowhere else to go without creating a 12-note language. Basically, you can't get any thicker, any more involved, any more chromatic, and his language is so unmistakably recognisable – he doesn't sound like anyone else. It's not like Zemlinsky, it's not like Mahler. When I was in Frankfurt, I knew I wanted to do those symphonies, but no record company wanted them. So, I did them anyway!' And, as with Schmidt, Paavo's interest in (and knowledge of) the music of Reger and

Hindemith was similarly instilled in him by his father. ‘Their neglect is a pity, but I grew up with a person like my father in the house who said, “Hindemith is a great composer. Listen, it’s great stuff!” And I was really enthused about it, and so most of my knowledge comes from moments like that. I was lucky. The same with Prokofiev: I mean, how many conductors conduct more than the First and Fifth Symphonies?’

The recent Tchaikovsky project, though, brings us right back to the so-called core repertoire. ‘We all know that Tchaikovsky is one of the great symphonists, and there’s no shortage of Tchaikovsky on concert programmes or recordings,’ Paavo admits. ‘I grew up listening to a lot of Tchaikovsky in Soviet Estonia.’ This was a time when Tchaikovsky performance in the USSR was dominated by the undoubtedly powerful approach taken by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra’s legendary and long-serving conductor Yevgeny Mravinsky. ‘His stamp was on it: “This is the right way of doing it and everybody who doesn’t do it this way just doesn’t know what they’re doing,” was the attitude,’ Paavo remembers. ‘But somehow it didn’t really speak to me. I just felt that with all the amazing playing and amazing discipline, the clarity and all that, somehow it lacked humanity. I conducted all the symphonies and then I stopped – I didn’t do them for maybe 10 years or more. But what changed my mind was when I was in Los Angeles with my brother and I heard some absolutely crazy performance on the radio. And I thought, “This is exactly what I like! It is so over the top, and some people will think it’s totally insanely exaggerated and in bad taste, but I love it. And of course, it was one of the last Lenny [Bernstein] recordings with the New York Philharmonic, and I felt it somehow gave me courage to say, “To hell with everything, and the whole tradition!” As you get a little bit older, you gain in confidence. And so I started conducting them again, and I realised what an amazing series they are, right from the First Symphony – it’s a gem.’

Just as his training took him west from Estonia to the US (to study in Philadelphia, at the Curtis Institute, and in LA with Bernstein), so his ideal Tchaikovsky interpreters came not from the then USSR but from Europe and America. ‘At the end of the day, what you don’t often hear in Mravinsky – or, indeed, in people like George Szell and Fritz Reiner – is “joy”. I hear precision, brilliance, energy, quality, all of those things that we’re in awe of, but I long for the kind of joy that you have in recordings by Charles Munch, or Bernstein, or Georges Prêtre.’

When Paavo arrived in Zurich, Tchaikovsky happened to be the first big project. ‘I thought, “I want an orchestra with a sound where I can actually get what I want.” I could go to some orchestras and they would do it the way they’re used to



Paavo’s gentle lockdown reflections have led to powerful conclusions

doing it, and with maybe a little nuance here and there. What I liked about the Tonhalle is that they don’t have this Tchaikovsky tradition like they do in Russia where there’s only one way and they’ve been doing it that way for years and years. I didn’t want them knowing every phrase of it already, so that there was no, “This is how it’s done,” coming from them. They were discovering every moment of it, and somehow they added their own emotion to it, they reacted to it like music that’s new.’

And we’re back to Paavo’s garden in London and those weeks of reflection. ‘I would sit out there alone, one day more beautiful than the day before. And I’d think, “Why am I doing this?” I loved waking up when I wanted to and making my own coffee, but a lot of questions gradually started to appear, like: “Why do I need to do so much repertoire?” And I’m still grappling with that one because I’m programmed that way. I want to do new things, I want to

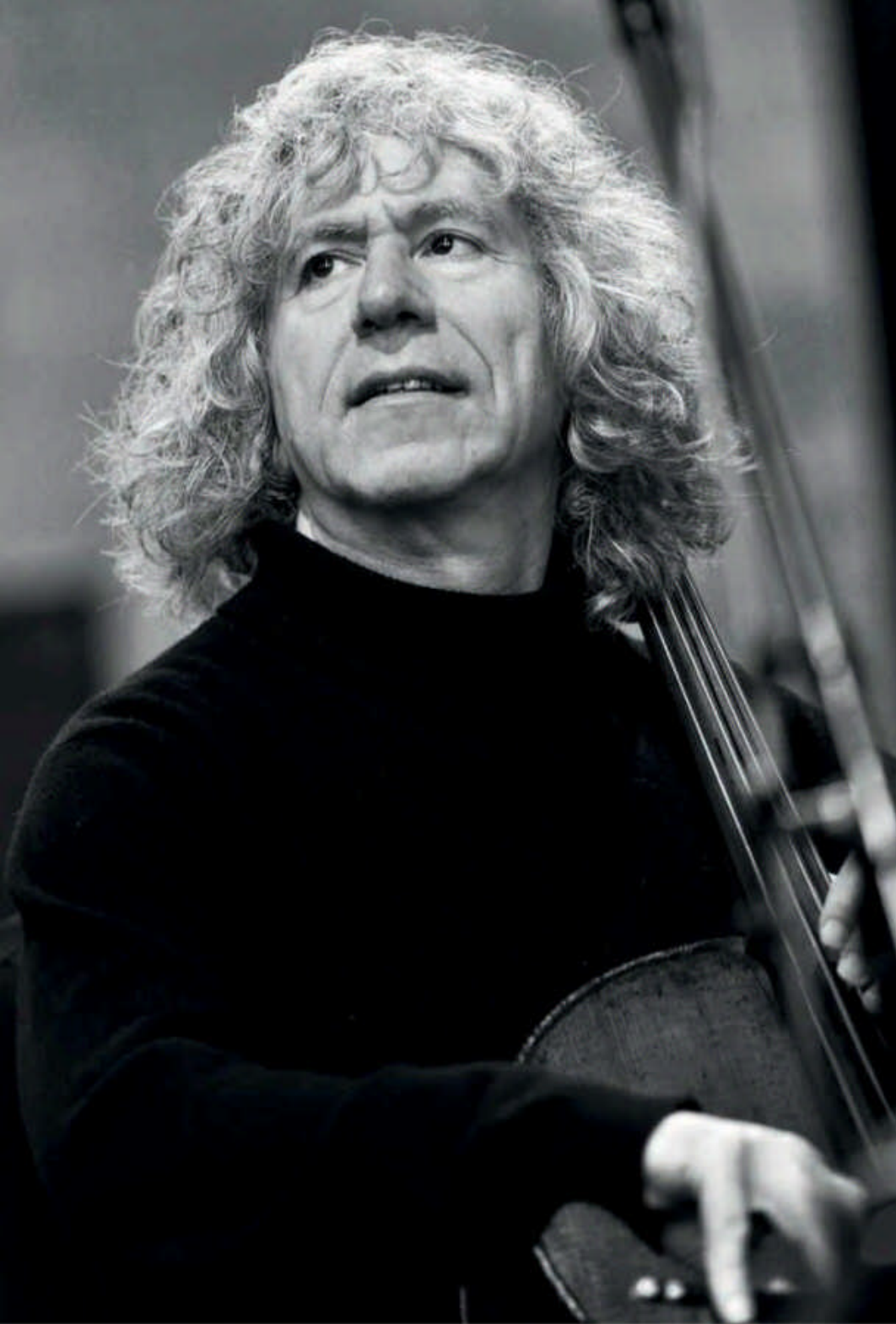
learn new things. To be honest with you, I was doing so much that I was nearing burnout. It’s not because I really wanted to do a lot, it’s because of all the things that I had to do with my own orchestras, which of course were priorities and commitments. And then there are orchestras that you can’t say no to, like the Berlin Philharmonic. I mean, that’s something that’s an honour. And there are a couple of other orchestras like this in the world which I have a relationship with – the Concertgebouw and the Philharmonia.

‘People often misunderstand burnout: it doesn’t just come from travelling, it comes from the repertoire. If you’re a violinist, you can play one or two concertos a year, which very often people do; but for me, every single programme is different. I’d spend three weeks in a row in Tokyo. And it’s really substantial stuff – *Turangalila*, Mahler symphonies, Strauss tone poems, Stravinsky ballets, and so on. You have to keep studying; mentally, you have to retain so much information. Also it’s not just about getting through it, you have to bring something to each piece – and I’m very self-critical.’

As to the future, the months of reflection prompted one decision. ‘If everything miraculously goes back to the way it was before, then I know that I will definitely do less work – maybe 20 per cent less. I feel that I need to. I need more time off. That’s what has come out of this first lockdown. And I’m very sceptical about travelling now. I’m happy to travel one or two hours by plane, but not eight hours.’ For European music lovers, that can only be good news; for those far-flung destinations, just be thankful that he loves making recordings almost as much as he likes giving concerts. **G**

► See our review of Paavo Järvi’s new Alpha recording of Tchaikovsky on page 44

‘I started conducting the Tchaikovsky symphonies again, and I realised what an amazing series they are’ – Paavo Järvi



Recording at All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, London, December 2019. Clockwise from top left: Steven Isserlis, Omer Meir Wellber, Matthew Rose, Abi Sampa

KEEPING TAVENER'S SPIRIT ALIVE

Cellist Steven Isserlis connected with composer Sir John Tavener on a spiritual, as well as musical, level. His new album celebrates their unique relationship, says **Charlotte Gardner**

The music of Sir John Tavener can sound like music from another, more beautiful and more spiritual, dimension. So it's perhaps rather appropriate that writing about Steven Isserlis's new recording – an intensely personal project for him, honouring a close friendship that began back in 1988 when he commissioned *The Protecting Veil* – has equally felt like receiving sonic postcards from a different world.

First, there are my notes made in December 2019 while attending the London recording session for *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Tavener's 2012 monodrama featuring bass-baritone and solo cello and dedicated to the memory of Isserlis's wife, Pauline, who died of cancer in 2010. I noted the appropriateness of recording this Russian Orthodox-redolent music in the warm acoustic of All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, the smell of incense still lingering in the air; the drama created by the work's juxtapositions of jagged, panicked scurrying strings, foreboding trombones and timpani with other sections of smooth, strings-only chordal stillness; the non-socially distanced Philharmonia Orchestra musicians sitting relaxed and alert under the direction of Omer Meir Wellber; Isserlis's curly-haired head inclined continuously and intently towards the bass-baritone Matthew Rose, the cellist's recitative-like, highest-register lines tightly superglued to Rose's own lowest-register ones ('The cello is like the subconscious of the singer,' Isserlis would tell me afterwards. 'I'm like his own double-stops. The only time the cello plays without the voice is the very last note of the piece').

Then, there's the recording of our early January interview in London, amid the merry lunchtime din of a Marble Arch brasserie, the microphone often struggling to pick out Isserlis's sprightly *sotto voce* over the racket from our close-quarters neighbouring tables. But now I'm transcribing it, it serves up the odd entertaining food flashback ('I should have brought a microscope,' comments Isserlis upon the arrival of his distinctly weight-watcher-esque smoked-salmon sandwich).

With the recording session still fresh in the memory when we meet, the natural conversation-starter is *The Death of Ivan*

'You couldn't make a more personal album. I told John I'd do it. I was always going to do it, as long as I wasn't going to die'

Ilyich, with its text drawn from the Tolstoy novella about a high-court judge's sufferings and death from a terminal illness. As it happens, though, the work also turns out to be our natural springboard for

other reasons. First, because it was at another eatery a mere stone's throw away that Tavener and his wife Maryanna – who selected the work's text – delivered the news to Isserlis that Tavener had finally found an idea worthy of the work he had promised to write in memory of Pauline. Then partly too because Isserlis's July 2013 premiere of the monodrama, at the Manchester International Festival, turned out to be the last time he saw Tavener face-to-face before the composer's own death four months later. Finally, though, because *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* really was the album's starting point.

'I think it was his biggest piece since his heart attack, and in rehearsal he was very nervous about whether people would like it,' remembers Isserlis. 'I really had to reassure him that it was a great piece.' He continues, 'I was then surprised at how thrilled he was when I called to say we were recording it. He was getting so many other recordings,

but he was still very excited. However, with the piece being only 27 minutes long, I had to think of others to pair with it. So I decided that it would be all Tavener, but the project just stretched and stretched to ridiculously expensive proportions – we needed an orchestra, a conductor, a chorus, a solo bass-baritone, a Sufi singer; and even after that we needed eight cellos.’ The resultant album was six years in fruition, as Isserlis gradually raised the funds through sponsorship and gifts, ‘And you couldn’t really make a more personal album,’ he concludes. ‘It’s just got everything in it for me.’ Then, earnestly: ‘I told him I was going to do it. I was always going to do it, as long as I wasn’t going to die.’

That aforementioned Sufi singer is for *Mabámátar* (2000), one of three works on the programme originally scored not for cello but for voice – although even by the time of its premiere, also at the 2013 Manchester festival, Isserlis was already on board; when Tavener had turned up at the first rehearsal, it transpired that the singer – Pakistani legend Abida Parveen – didn’t read music and wouldn’t sing the part Tavener had written, leading to Isserlis proposing that he play the vocal line himself on the cello while Parveen improvised on top. The result was that the work ended up not just being saved, but in fact enriched. ‘It went beautifully,’ he remembers. ‘The first time there was no correlation between what she and I were doing. But every time we did it, it got closer and closer, and by the time of the concert she was really responding to John’s music.’

Back to the recording, and while the improvisations of Sufi singer Abi Sampa are inevitably different from those of Parveen, Isserlis says he can hear the relation between them. ‘I was very happy,’ he says. ‘As we started, I realised I’d forgotten how beautiful this piece is. It’s a mantra. I play the same thing over and over again, while the singer improvises a hymn of praise. It’s hypnotic, and just somehow very moving. John just had it. Another composer could write something like that and it would be very boring. If I’m honest, I think John’s music is variable. Some of it *can* sound boring. But when he’s on, he’s really *on* ... And that piece is really on.’



Top: with Maryanna Tavener; bottom: Rose, Isserlis, Wellber and the album production team

‘I don’t think there’s much fun in John’s music, but there was joy and a lot of jokes around rehearsing and performing it’

Listen to any Tavener anecdote from Isserlis, and it’s not long before you’re treated to his drawling imitation of the composer’s voice. It’s funny, irreverent, and completely at odds with both Tavener’s spiritual-sounding music rooted in religious ritual (most especially the Russian Orthodox faith to which he converted) and the serious and rather intimidating figure he cuts in most photos – though notably not the album’s cover portrait, taken at that 2013 Manchester festival by Isserlis’s photographer partner Joanna Bergin, and which Tavener himself said he loved, commenting, ‘I finally look alive. I always look so dead in all the other photos.’ So who was the real Tavener?

‘There was always quite a lot of laughter,’ Isserlis says, slowly and thoughtfully. ‘There was a lot of teasing from me. And snorts from him. It was never heavy. Whereas I don’t think there’s much fun in his music. It’s more third-person music in that way. But there was joy and a lot

of jokes around rehearsing and performing it.’

He didn’t seem like a funny guy from afar, I comment. ‘I know! That was his public persona, and it used to drive me crazy. I used to imitate him all the time. I went too far sometimes, I’m sure. A story I’ve often told from early on is about when we went to an Indian restaurant with various friends – I think after a concert of *The Protecting Veil* – and, sitting there holding court, he started complaining about another composer.’ Isserlis’s voice assumes its Tavener guise. ‘“Ehhhhhhoooooh, he looks so *unspiritual*!” And

I said, “At least he doesn’t sit around with bits of poppadom around his mouth.” There was a sort of silence, and then, “Ehhhhhhoooooh, sorry.” And then I knew it was OK to tease him. He was very,

very different in private. I mean, by the end, he was himself in interviews, and that’s what I loved. I remember – maybe the last time, or the second-to-last time, I spoke to him – I called him up to say how much I’d enjoyed his interview on the BBC’s *HARDtalk*, because finally he was really himself.’

Back to the programme, and with Russian orthodoxy and Sufism under our belts, we now arrive at Catholicism for *Popule meus* (published 2009), based on the Good Friday series of antiphons and responses known as the Reproaches, and the



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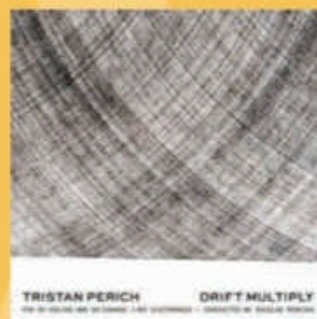
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I Still Play



'It wouldn't be an exaggeration to claim that new music during the past 30 years or so would have taken a very different course were it not for Robert Hurwitz. As president of Nonesuch, he not only successfully nurtured and furthered the recording careers of composers; he also foresaw the far-reaching changes in listening habits and musical accessibility that took place during this time. The high regard in which Hurwitz was held among the many musicians with whom he worked is reflected on this excellent disc of piano pieces. Like Andriessen's souvenir, other pieces draw on a diverse range of references to reflect Hurwitz's own catholic tastes. And herein lies the secret to both Hurwitz and Nonesuch's success: an ability, as Hurwitz himself put it, to make music 'for the other people in the room'.'

— Gramophone



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— Gramophone



SARAH KIRKLAND SNIDER
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Friends reunited: Isserlis playing *Popule meus* to Tavener at Mapperton House, Dorset, in 2010

only solo cello (with orchestra) work on the album. ‘So this was a piece written at a time when we weren’t in touch, although he always said that it was for my sound,’ begins Isserlis. ‘Unfortunately, we’d had a quarrel, the details of which are not important. Then I suddenly heard he’d had a heart attack [in 2007] and was about to die, and I went to see him at the hospital.’ He continues: ‘I chose it for the album because it was the very first music I played to him when we’d become close

‘This sounds very egotistical, but once in an interview John called my cello “the voice of his soul”. Seven pieces he wrote for me’

again. I’d agreed to learn it for a performance in Nashville alongside the Elgar Concerto, but I wasn’t convinced by it. So I asked to play it to him. Our two families met up in Dorset, and when I played it, it was like him coming back to life. As ever, he told me things, sang bits of where he was quoting from, things like that.’ Still, even after that session, Isserlis remained unconvinced. ‘Certainly, it’s not the most subtle piece,’ he explains. “‘Evil’ is timpani-banging and low notes, then

“goodness” is high cello. It’s not unexpected. And I didn’t think the proportions were quite right. But *then*, working on it for this recording, I did begin to believe in it. It works in the end, as long as the tender bits are truly melting and they actually answer and talk to each other. Interestingly, Maryanna was at the session, and *she* commented that although John was never really sure about this piece, this recording had now also convinced her. I wish he’d been there, because I think he would have agreed and would have been pleased.’

The two men were clearly very collaborative, I say. ‘Yeah ...’ comes the response, Isserlis lost in thought. ‘I just felt I understood his music almost from the beginning. It spoke to me. My teacher introduced me to Russian Orthodox music when I was about 11 years old and I completely fell in love with it. I remember exactly the disc – it was an EP of the Russian Orthodox cathedral choir in Paris on the rue Daru, and when I went to Paris for the first time I went straight to find it. I’m Jewish, and Russian Orthodox and Jewish music are very close. Sorry, this sounds very egotistical, but once in an interview John called my cello “the voice of his soul”. Seven pieces he wrote for me, and then there were other pieces he was apparently writing for me too.’

One aspect of Tavener’s musical language that comes less naturally to Isserlis, though, is Indian music; *Popule meus*, for example, includes passages requiring a graceful, dancing Indian feel. ‘This was one thing I found hard in *The Protecting Veil*, too,’ he comments, ‘and for *Popule meus* I had to work on it: listening to myself, going a little faster, being more undulating – I *hope* I eventually got it.

There’s always room for improvement. A recording’s never going to be perfection: it’s a “photograph” of that day.’

The album-opening *Preces and Responses* (2013), meanwhile, was recorded in the chapel of Balliol College, Oxford, and takes us back to the Church of England faith Tavener began with. How Isserlis’s 2014 arrangement came into being almost defies belief. ‘Ah! Now that’s a *strange* story, but it happened!’ he exclaims. ‘It was so awful when John died. It’s not like I saw him often, but it was so shocking, and I kept dreaming about him. Then one night I had this incredibly clear dream where he came to me and said, “Steven, you’ve got to arrange my last completed piece for cello.” He didn’t tell me a title. It was so vivid. When I woke up I called Maryanna, and she laughed and said, “Actually, it’s called *It Is Finished!* But it wouldn’t work for cello. It was just a dream.” But it so happened that a few days later I was meeting James Rushton, John’s publisher, and told him the story and how ridiculous it was, and he said, “Actually, no, there was one piece after that called *Preces and Responses*, and I can imagine it on the cello. I’m going to send it to you.” When I opened it, I saw that it was for priest and chorus, and it’s so beautiful. Much as I love music, not much of it makes me cry, but I find the central Lord’s Prayer just heart-melting. I don’t think he wrote anything more beautiful than that. My eight-cello arrangement is very simple and true to

the original, with my solo part basically following the words of the priest, which I have in front of me as I play (and when we publish it, I'll include the words and leave it to the cellist to decide on the rhythms). When I'd completed my arrangement, I got together seven of my nearest and dearest – students, former students, my best friend [Endellion Quartet cellist] David Waterman – and you can imagine how exciting it was at our first rehearsal at the Royal Academy of Music. "It works!" we all said.'


Finally, the title-track and programme-closer: Isserlis's 2017 eight-cello arrangement of 'No longer mourn for me', taken from Tavener's choral *Three Shakespeare Sonnets* (2010) – dedicated to Maryanna and premiered a few days after he died. 'John knew he would die early, he was leaving her that message, and it's beautiful to end the disc with that,' Isserlis explains. 'I couldn't bear to go to the concert, but I heard it on the radio, and even then I thought it would be worth arranging for cello. I love *Preces and Responses*, but in a way the real masterpiece is 'No longer mourn for me'. It's just very tender, and again, my cello arrangement deviates very little from the original.'

I probe him for more anecdotes on how they worked together. 'He certainly wasn't good at metronome marks,' he comments. 'For *The Protecting Veil* he said something like, "Minims should be slower or faster depending on the acoustic." I said, "John, that's not very helpful!" He wasn't a practical person like that. Occasionally, I'd say, "No, that'll never work on the cello, why don't we do this?" – but not often.'

'He's got his voice, and a composer who has their individual voice has a place. There's a sense of theatre. Tavener is communicative'

If his metronome markings weren't terribly clear, what will happen when Isserlis is no longer around to tell cellists what the composer wanted? 'People will have to do it by instinct,' comes the matter-of-fact reply, 'and if they don't have the instinct, they're never going to understand it anyway.'

As for whether Tavener's music will still be getting airtime a hundred years from now, Isserlis wouldn't like to say. But asked whether it has a place in today's musical sphere, he answers swiftly and firmly, 'Yes. He's got his voice, and a composer who has their individual voice has a place. As I said, there are some pieces which don't do it for me, but others that really do, and I think there's a very individual sort of beauty which moves you. And a sense of theatre. I mean, that's what makes *The Whale* and *Preces and Responses* work. He's communicative.'

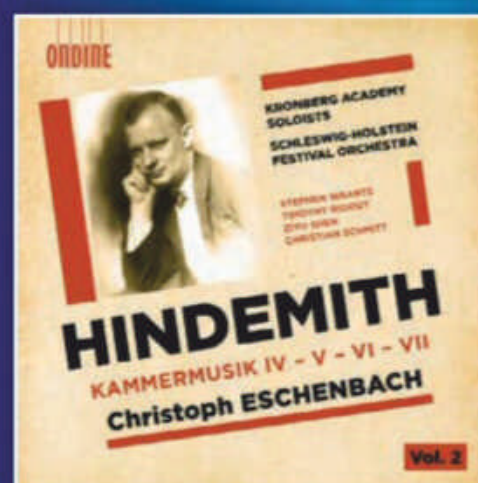
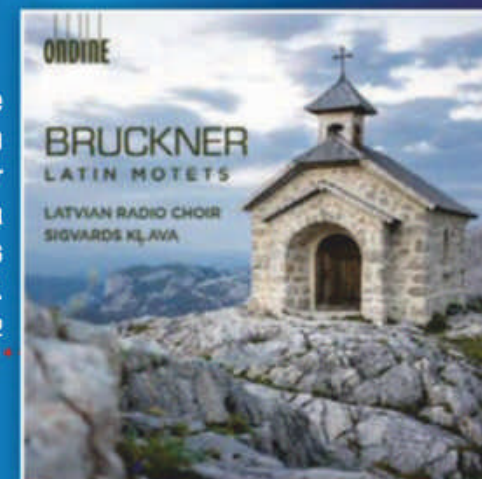
My brief has been to bring out the personal element of their musical relationship. So, if Isserlis were allowed to keep only one memory of their time together, what would it be? His eyebrows lift, and he throws me a gently challenging, sidelong glance, then a pause followed by the gentlest and most hesitant response. 'I think when bad things happened in my life I would often turn to him. He had that sort of ... I don't know. You'd turn to him if somebody died, or something. He would be comforting. When Pauline's father died he sent me an icon.' Another pause. 'Yes. That's why you were either deep friends with him or not friends at all. He would tell you about his most intimate secrets, and you would find yourself confiding in him too.' His voice switches up a gear. 'And being driven crazy by him, often! It's funny, because Maryanna and I went for lunch during the first recording session and we found ourselves just complaining about him! It's the way he was. He drove us crazy, but we all loved him.' 

► To read Gramophone's review of Isserlis's new Tavener album turn to page 44

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Sounding out JOSQUIN

Peter Phillips and The Tallis Scholars have now recorded all 18 of Josquin's Masses. With the early music world preparing to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the composer's death, Phillips tells **Ivan Moody** why Josquin's 'got what it takes'

Josquin des Prés, the 500th anniversary of whose death will be celebrated next year, has a unique position in the history of music. His works were published and published again, and so much music by other composers was attributed to him that it was said that he was composing more posthumously than when he had been alive. The humanists Cosimo Bartoli and Heinrich Glarean

compared Josquin respectively to Michelangelo and Virgil, and he was highly praised by the famous theorist Gioseffo Zarlino and by Martin Luther, who called him 'the master of the notes'. One might have thought that every early music ensemble would be queuing up to perform and record the work of a composer of this stature, but while it is true that Josquin has never lacked for advocates, only The Tallis Scholars have made a monumental



Peter Phillips, March 2019; The Tallis Scholars, church of Santa Clara, Estella, Spain, September 2019; engraving of Josquin (after woodcut, 1611) for JD Champlin's *Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians*, New York, 1889



attempt to understand his work and to make it available in the form of recordings. The French ensemble A Sei Voci recorded seven of his Masses before it ceased to exist, but The Tallis Scholars have now recorded, across a staggering nine discs, all the 18 Masses believed to have been written by Josquin, together with the *Missa Da pacem* now widely credited to Noel Bauldeweyn.

One of the fascinating aspects of this phenomenon is that Josquin's music (and, indeed, music of his time in general) has been seen as suitable for male-voice ensembles, with the possible occasional addition of male sopranos or children's voices. The Tallis Scholars, whose mixed-voice sound was (or was at least perceived to be) founded on the more richly scored music (both from Britain and continental Europe) from the later Renaissance, was possibly not the most obvious ensemble to take on this repertoire. But in fact, the enormous success of the first disc in the series, containing the *Missa Pange lingua* and the *Missa La sol fa re mi*, which in 1987 became the first disc in the Early Music category ever to win *Gramophone's* Recording of the Year, changed that perception very radically, and The Tallis Scholars themselves continued to build on that achievement.

The recording industry itself has seen significant and disruptive changes since then, of course, but it is clear that that

'What attracted me to Josquin was the quality of the writing that I already knew and his reputation in his lifetime'

first disc set in motion a phenomenal wave of discovery that is only now, 34 years later, coming to an end. When I ask Peter Phillips about this, he notes that in fact things have not changed hugely for the group: 'We still do exactly what we did at the beginning of the series in 1986 – a stereo microphone positioned on the sweet spot in a carefully chosen building. Then we encourage the singers to sing out. Not to have banks of faders and

a forest of mics was unusual in 1986 – now what we (still) do is normal. We do record a lot of takes, and we do a lot of editing. I suppose what's changed most for us is the development of

digital editing. We can now go into, and refine, the performance in much greater detail.' Indeed. Although the personnel has, inevitably, changed over the years, one is struck, on listening through

the entire sequence, by its remarkable consistency of sound.

Recording Josquin's Masses, and coming to an understanding of the way they work, has resulted in a distillation of this knowledge in an extensive article by Phillips ('Heaven and Earth: A Performer's Guide to Josquin's Masses', *Musical Times*, Autumn 2018) which I recommend as a listeners' as much as a performers' guide. To follow the series of Masses in chronological sequence (insofar as this can be accurately determined) is to follow in the clearest way the evolution of

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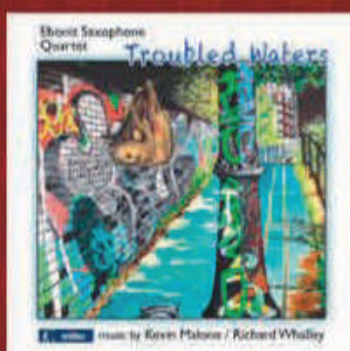
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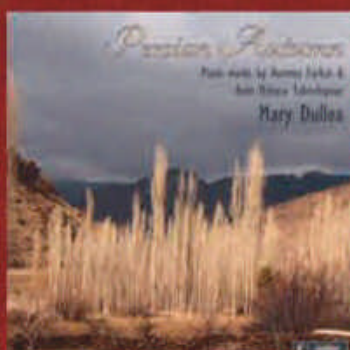
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Josquin's style and technique. But what precisely is it about Josquin that led The Tallis Scholars to undertake their monumental series of recordings? 'What attracted me to him in the first place', says Phillips, 'was the quality of the writing that I already knew and his reputation in his lifetime. What attracted me to his Masses as a set was the hope that here was a composer of genius who was prepared to start afresh pretty well every time he put pen to paper.

So unlike Palestrina! I wanted to find out if he could work his magic every time while trying out something new every time. I could have chosen the motets, but there was a neatness about dealing in the same texts across the set.'

But was the set planned as such right from the beginning? 'I didn't know whether Josquin would hold up when we started in 1986 – in fact, we didn't plan the set for some years – but I increasingly had the impression that every Mass had its own sound world. This impression has been borne out, thrillingly. And it was up to us to find those differences. The end result is evidence that he was as good as everyone said at the time, although it is almost impossible to define "Josquin's style". It's a fascinating journey. To travel from the earliest Masses to the astounding smooth maturity of the *Missa Pange lingua* is genuinely riveting, and, in spite of doubts that still subsist concerning the actual dates of composition, the experience can be compared to following the progress of Beethoven, for example, through his symphonies or piano concertos.

Listening to the Masses in chronological order of recording is, of course, to follow the changes in the approach of The Tallis Scholars over the years. Though the ensemble has always been renowned for the smooth perfection of its sound, I would argue that to compare the first, *Gramophone* Award-winning, recording of this series with the final disc, just released, containing three Masses – *Hercules dux Ferrariae*, *D'ung aultre amer* and *Faysant regretz* – is to become aware of a very much greater understanding and projection of Josquin's sound world. That reflection leads me to return, in spite of the consistency of recorded sound I noted earlier, to the question of scoring, given that the standard line-up of The Tallis Scholars, as well as the larger part of their repertoire, suggests being geared to later Renaissance music. 'Yes, we set up the group to sing music of the high Renaissance, with two soprano parts, and for most of the first 12 years this was all we did. But once we had done a lot



Gramophone Awards 1987, with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf

of it, I decided to go back in time and not forwards. That was a defining decision – not to search for Palestrina in Monteverdi, but to search for him in earlier composers. Josquin was the first step in that process, which eventually led to Obrecht, Ockeghem and the Eton Choirbook. For all this we needed to rearrange ourselves. A few aberrations apart, I think Josquin's basic choir – wherever he went – was low soprano/alto, tenor,

tenor/baritone, bass. This was an international standard everywhere outside England, where the five-voice basic layout changed everything.' This is, of course, why only certain of Josquin's works ever became part of the repertoire of most modern choirs: the *Missa Pange lingua* became the best known of the Mass settings not only because of its quality, but because it can seem to fit the standard four-part choir format if you transpose it up far enough.

This fact also had an immediate practical implication for The Tallis Scholars in terms of which voices would sing this music: 'The real issue is the overall range of just about all the parts, at times. I've gone into detail about this in my article, but practically speaking, no pitch is going to sort out the problem completely. No one is trained nowadays to sing a two-octave range into a symphony hall without a mic. The only answer is to have two overlapping voices singing together;

and once you agree to that, the sky's the limit. Authenticity has gone, but then it was never really there, because we simply don't produce our voices as they did.'

Indeed, Phillips has always been quite clear that he has never sought 'authenticity', but instead has sought to create an ensemble sound that best and most appropriately serves the music. The decision, therefore, to find the sound that best fitted Josquin, using overlapping voices, is both unsurprising and entirely logical. And the resulting sound is quite unlike that which many other ensembles have chosen when performing not only Josquin but music from the 15th and early 16th centuries generally. To listen now to the pioneering recording of the *Missa Di dadi* by the Medieval Ensemble of London, for example, made for Decca L'Oiseau-Lyre in 1984, is to be aware that the group's sound arose from a vision of this period as being built on the achievements of the composers of the Middle Ages: this was, after all, an ensemble that also recorded Machaut and Matteo da Perugia, as well as the complete secular music of Dufay and Ockeghem.

'It wasn't until the 1987 Gramophone Award that we obliged the outside world to take us, the sound and Josquin seriously'



One may say the same of Ensemble Organum's recording of the *Missa Pange lingua* for Harmonia Mundi, from two years later. In that context, Phillips's decision to go in the opposite direction, from the composers of the high Renaissance to Josquin and his generation, not only seems daring but explains the nature of the sound produced in this repertoire.

This philosophy has in fact characterised the group from the very beginning. 'Even for the first concert in November 1973', says Phillips, 'I was trying to find singers who were likely to make the sound I wanted. I had heard this sound in embryo around me in Oxford in the preceding year, not least from The Clerkes of Oxenford, which I sang in. Ever since that first concert I have been trying to recapture the sound that I think I heard. Every concert since then has been a search for that sound live on stage, which quickly became an idealised sound, not easy to reproduce. Nonetheless, I start again every time, with the singers I have in front of me.'

The struggle to make the transition from an amateur group to a professional one is familiar to many who work in the choral world in Britain, but Phillips makes the point that, 'In effect, The Tallis Scholars were never amateur. Some of those first singers were being paid as professionals elsewhere (at Christ Church, Oxford, for example), though not by me in the very first concerts. However, I had started to pay some of them by the mid-1970s. The move to becoming a "professional" group was really only an extension of my desire to get better and more suitable singers for my sound. To get them to come over from Cambridge, for example, I had to find some money (which came entirely from door receipts – I had no private money and no sponsors).' Nevertheless, there was a struggle in terms of perception: 'The professional world we aspired to inhabit was something else, of course. It took years to be accepted – whether or how much I was paying was not really the issue. We stumbled several times, and it wasn't until the 1987 *Gramophone* Award that we



Top: at Merton College, Oxford, January 2017; bottom: the author (right) with Phillips

'Josquin is very well known, but his music is not; I even hesitate to put him on some concert programmes. Yet people are curious'

to explore ever smaller areas of the repertoire, supported by public interest and often with video backup. Our more recent efforts – Mouton, Taverner, Pärt – have been subsumed into a healthy scene. To remain visible in the contemporary marketplace we needed to give the best concerts of their kind without pricing ourselves out of the market, and also record something no one else was doing that was worth the effort and expense. Josquin was the perfect answer, because although *he* is

obliged that outside world to take us, the sound and Josquin seriously.'

This inevitably leads me to ask how Phillips sees his exploration of Josquin in the wider context of what The Tallis Scholars set out to achieve. Have the group's recordings changed public perception of Josquin as a composer, or perhaps of the music of the Renaissance in a more general sense? 'Public perception of the Renaissance subtly changes every few months, a process which has become increasingly international in recent years. Originally, I just intended to map out the territory, like a schoolboy collecting things. So we recorded lots of basic high Renaissance stuff, before we came to the Josquin period. This policy was not profit-driven, incidentally; I just did the next thing I thought needed doing, following my plan. Josquin was next. I think those early discs were influential – look at the effect the Cardoso one had – and the result is that nowadays many groups have the opportunity

to explore ever smaller areas of the repertoire, supported by public interest and often with video backup. Our more recent efforts – Mouton, Taverner, Pärt – have been subsumed into a healthy scene. To remain visible in the contemporary marketplace we needed to give the best concerts of their kind without pricing ourselves out of the market, and also record something no one else was doing that was worth the effort and expense. Josquin was the perfect answer, because although *he* is very well known, his music is not; I even hesitate to put him on programmes in some places. And yet people are curious. He's got what it takes, and slowly the world will discover this, as they

discovered not only Cardoso but also Clemens, Sheppard and Brumel from us years ago.'

Not everyone is hesitant to programme Josquin, however: the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin will see The Tallis Scholars performing all 18 Masses over four days in August 2021, coinciding with the date of Josquin's death (recorded as being August 27, 1521). It is difficult to imagine a more appropriate tribute to a composer whom The Tallis Scholars have helped to place before the public in a way he had never before been placed, or a better way to celebrate a project which has surely been one of the greatest undertakings ever in recorded music. **G** See *The Tallis Scholars online on December 12 as part of 'Live From London – Christmas'*; visit voces8.foundation/livefromlondon

► Read our review of The Tallis Scholars' final Josquin Mass album on page 68

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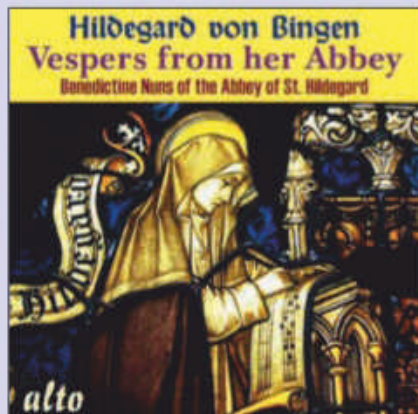
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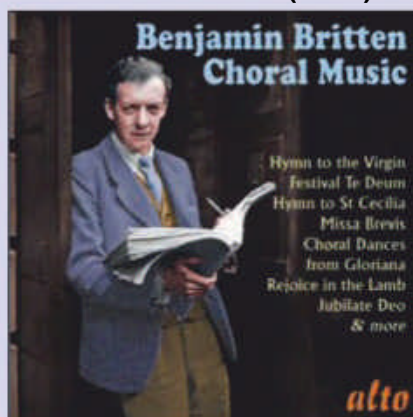
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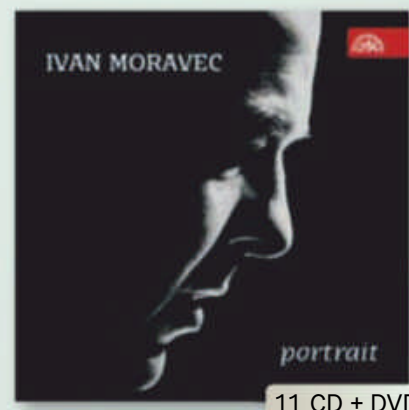
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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Andrew Mellor finds strong allies in Thomas Dausgaard and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra in making the case for Nielsen's early symphonies as essential masterpieces



Nielsen

Symphonies – No 1, Op 7^a; No 2, 'The Four Temperaments', Op 16^b

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard

Seattle Symphony Media © SSMO24 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at the S Mark Taper Auditorium, Benaroya Hall, Seattle, ^aJanuary 30 & February 1, 2019; ^bApril 4, 6 & 7, 2020

Nielsen's early symphonies aren't just well-kept secrets; they are essential listening for anyone serious about understanding the composer's place in 20th-century music.

Symphony No 1 raises eyebrows in musicological circles by dint of its 'progressive tonality' – the first work of its kind not to play by the rules on its tonal journey. But the whoops and cheers you hear at the end of this live performance from Seattle aren't rooted in musicological analysis. They are startled, delighted reactions to the sense of energy, rupture and chaos that punch out of the music – that would infiltrate the composer's better-known later symphonies but are even more striking here for their almost Mendelssohnian context.

'Like a child playing with dynamite', concluded the critic Charles Kjerulf after the symphony's first performance in 1894 – a compliment, make no mistake. Kjerulf recognised the long-term significance of the symphony's disruptive organised recklessness, of a new hard-edged Nordic modernism ready to blow the lied-born Germanic style that dominated Scandinavian music out of the water. Nielsen himself wrote to his wife as he prepared to conduct the piece in Dresden: 'I feel



'Playing it safe in Nielsen's music is an interpretative non-starter but that doesn't preclude care and preparation'

certain that such a piece as this will ... open everyone's ears and eyes to all the gravy and grease you hear in the imitators of Wagner.'



Thomas Dausgaard makes a thrilling case for early Nielsen

Its successor is the one work in Nielsen's cycle that steps out of line – which can't, arguably, be included in a straight trajectory drawn from the First to the Sixth. Its inspiration was an isolated object: a painting spotted in a coaching inn depicting the ancient Greek notion of the 'Four Temperaments' – the idea that human emotions can be grouped into four states or humours. Nielsen and his companions were tickled pink in particular by its depiction of the 'choleric' man on horseback, whose 'eyes were bulging out of his head, his face distorted with rage', according to the composer, who himself 'could not help but burst out laughing' – a note to performers if ever there was one.

Themes are more clear-cut in this piece but Nielsen's affront to German 'gravy and grease' is there in the tornado that tears the symphony open – the first four all open with such disorientating, chaotic gestures – and in the invading forces and unsettling niggles that stalk the central argument.

A decade after the First, this symphony still felt like the work of a renegade, another critic deeming that the symphony's colours were 'very brutal and in their crudeness easily cross the aesthetic line'.

Playing it safe in Nielsen's music is an interpretative non-starter but that doesn't preclude care and preparation. Here, the breathlessness that slightly undermined the first instalment in Thomas Dausgaard's Seattle Nielsen cycle (Symphonies Nos 3 and 4 – 8/18) is traded for sheer speed. The results are startling. Tempos are so often irrelevant in the context of overall footing,



Virtuoso swagger: Thomas Dausgaard guides the Seattle Symphony Orchestra in a Nielsen cycle of growing confidence and bravado

phrasing and balance but here Dausgaard's are up to 20 per cent faster than those chosen by Oramo in Stockholm and Gilbert in New York.

Speed requires confidence, and you can feel the Seattle Symphony's building with this further exploration of what remains an alien aesthetic to so many orchestras. More to the point, Nielsen's first two symphonies can take it: No 1 with its short, jabbing, insistent phrases and sense of unease founded on the banana skin of an opening chord in the wrong key; No 2 so easily weighed down by overly literal interpretations of its four temperamental states that forget Nielsen's ear for caricature. Dausgaard doesn't. His performance of *The Four Temperaments* is the real winner here.

Still, he is not averse to intervention. His choreography at the pivotal developmental passage from 4'40" in the First Symphony's opening *Allegro* feels stage-managed; his acceleration (unmarked) through the Second Symphony's final bars is

unnecessary and borders on the crass. But so much of what he does elsewhere is fortifying and works with the music's vibrant, life-affirming central conceits – the Dadaist moments and ominous signals in No 2, the big-boned counterpoint in the finale of No 1, which surges here like few other performances. Slow movements do far more than lie on their backs in flat Danish fields; the First Symphony's *Andante* bulges and simmers with passion – a new perspective of the speed, but created with other tools besides.

Nielsen's Second is better suited to the fat, boomy sound picture, and the thrusting Seattle playing (and rollicking brass) to the music's sheer bravado. The swagger in the performance matches the music, especially when the entire ensemble appears to lift its feet up at 7'30" in the 'choleric' *Allegro* (a performance to put you in mind of Morton Gould's with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra – RCA, 6/67). Nielsen's First usually works best with a clearer, more translucent and 'classical' sound picture

but here Dausgaard's constant underlining of the music's obviousness gets him off the hook. Fresh, fascinating but not uncontroversial accounts, which is just what this neglected early Nielsen needs. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Christian Hoskins explores music by the short-lived Hans Rott:

'This is clearly influenced by Mendelssohn and Wagner but notably stylish and assured for an 18-year-old' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



William Yeoman enjoys an album by the Chinese guitarist Xuefei Yang:

'Listening to this release is like watching a parade of exquisitely rendered beasts on a silk handscroll' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**

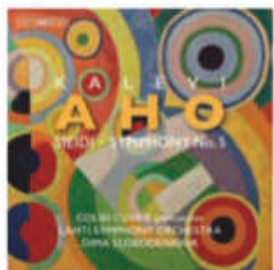
Aho

Symphony No 5^a. *Sieidi*^b

^bColin Currie *perc* Lahti Symphony Orchestra /

Dima Slobodeniouk, ^aJaan Ots

BIS (F) BIS2336 (61' • DDD/DSD)



I have heard no more impactful or well-argued work from Kalevi Aho's pen than his Symphony No 5. It is a symphonic search for answers, consensus or perhaps just freedom from the chaos and contrast of the world in which a tight, dense weave emerges from an opening melee. Over the course of a single movement, that weave is forced through various challenges and crises before literally splitting, two orchestras veering off on different courses (a moment requiring two conductors, for which Dima Slobodeniouk is assisted by Jaan Ots).

In its final section, the symphony musters and enacts a wrenching, intense process of rebuilding which is released in an instant, not unlike the Fifth Symphony of Aho's most famous countryman. As in Sibelius's Fifth, the work changed Aho's view of his own capabilities, convincing him that 'anything was possible' in compositional terms. It gets a deep, highly involved performance from the Lahti Symphony Orchestra in which Slobodeniouk marshals all its contradictory intensities towards the final moment of release with skill. It's hard not to think of the pilot Slobodeniouk balancing his plane in heavy crosswinds and putting it down square in the middle of the runway's touchdown zone.

Aho's percussion concerto *Sieidi*, commissioned by its soloist Colin Currie, isn't so satisfying – in the long term at least. Its theme is ritual and shamanism in universal terms, though the title comes from the Sámi people's denoting of a sacred space. Aho says it could be a concerto for orchestra, which sums up the limited ways in which the percussion

is integrated into the whole; often, Currie's spectacular playing doesn't feel structurally important and could have been taken by any number of other instruments. Ethnic references – African, Arabic, Oriental – feel a little tokenistic, like the typecasting of certain percussion instruments. It will have your foot tapping, but there are plenty of familiar tricks, the 'fall' from the *Allegretto* to the *Presto* being a particularly old one. Besides, Aho does more fascinating things with rhythm in his own *Symphonic Dances* (7/04).

Andrew Mellor

Beethoven • JS Bach

JS Bach Solo Violin Sonata No 1, BWV1001 –

Adagio Beethoven Violin Concerto, Op 61^a

Daniel Lozakovich *vn*

^aMunich Philharmonic Orchestra /

Valery Gergiev

DG (F) 483 8946GH (48' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, December 2019



This latest Beethoven Violin Concerto recording might, in a sense, be called

a 'Homage to Fritz Kreisler', and not just because the hugely gifted Daniel Lozakovich dispatches Kreisler's cadenzas, the first of which climaxes to an ingenious merging of the concerto's two principal themes. For those who are perplexed by the rather short-measure G minor solo Bach coupling, you might be interested to know that for his first recording of the work (with the Staatskapelle Berlin under Leo Blech on HMV DB990-5) Kreisler filled the remaining shellac side with the same Bach movement, there as here expressively played.

Lozakovich's way with the Concerto is light years removed from various modern 'upgrades' involving adapted versions of Beethoven's cadenza for his piano version of the work, with Isabelle Faust, Christian Tetzlaff and Thomas Zehetmair

being among those who are – or were – new kids on the block turning their backs on the old guard. Not that I'm complaining: this of all violin concertos needs to sound vital. But there's always room for a warm, vibrant rendition such as Lozakovich offers us here, with well-chosen tempos and Valery Gergiev cueing a strong, sonorous account of the orchestral score. Although relatively spacious, it's never sluggish or ponderous, and there's plenty of inner detail on offer. The slow movement is especially beautiful, the cadenza into the finale boldly assertive, while the finale itself is full of life.

As to where it should stand in the overall scheme of things, recommendations-wise (I'm thinking digital rather than analogue, where the field of comparisons is vast), that's rather more difficult. Zehetmair, Tetzlaff, Kremer, Kavakos and Faust between them ushered in a brave new world that all should visit, whereas Lozakovich offers a more traditional rendition that demonstrates his obvious love for the piece. While not 'period savvy', it's deeply felt and sincerely musical, more in line with James Ehnes or Hilary Hahn. If you're following Lozakovich's progress on disc thus far, this latest DG album is fully up to the high standards already established by its predecessors. A handsome sound production, recorded live – though the documentation doesn't claim as much and there's no giveaway applause. **Rob Cowan**

Beethoven

Nine Symphonies. Symphony No 10 – 1st movt (compl Cooper). Coriolan, Op 62. Egmont, Op 84 – Overture. Fidelio – Overture; Leonore Overture No 3. Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus, Op 43 – Overture; No 9; No 16

Genia Kühmeier *sop* Anke Vondung *mez*

Michael König *ten* Jochen Kupfer *bass*

Luxembourg Chamber Choir; Solistes

Européens, Luxembourg / Christoph König

Rubicon (M) (F) RCD1036 (6h 31' • DDD)

Recorded live 2009-19



Sense of tradition: Daniel Lozakovich brings warmth and vibrancy to Beethoven's Violin Concerto, replete with Fritz Kreisler's cadenzas



Christoph König's survey of the nine Beethoven symphonies (plus sundry overtures

and Barry Cooper's realisation of sketches for the Tenth) is quite likeable, all things considered. There are some extremely fine players in the Luxembourg-based Solistes Européens, particularly among the woodwinds, though I can't say the orchestra are anywhere near the top tier, for far too often the strings appear thinned and ragged. The quality of the recorded sound is variable, too, presumably reflecting the fact that they were captured over the span of a decade. (The booklet gives no indication that they're live recordings, and there's no applause, but a few coughs and other aural artefacts suggest a concert performance.) And yet the best of these spirited, handsomely muscular and warm-hearted interpretations gave me considerable pleasure.

If you care to sample the set, I'd suggest skipping the First Symphony. Unaccountably soft-grained, with a restless slow movement and squarely

phrased Menuetto, it comes to life only in the finale. The Second makes a more positive impression once one gets past the slow introduction, with its flattened dynamic contrasts, and into the *Allegro con brio*. Once there, König brings a real sense of drama to the music; the pauses crackle with anticipation, the themes are sharply characterised and everywhere the playing packs a playful punch. He hews close to the metronome markings in some movements but he doesn't seem particularly consistent in this regard, and his lack of dogma is, frankly, refreshing. And when he does aim to hit the challengingly brisk markings, as in the Second's lovely *Larghetto*, he still gives the phrases sufficient breathing room to bloom.

König and his Luxembourgers made a decent recording of the *Eroica* back in 2011 – cleverly coupled with a contemporaneous symphony by Méhul (Rubicon, 3/18) – and I prefer it to this 2018 remake, despite a significant improvement in sonic clarity. Tempos are on the brisk side in both, but this new version is often urgent to the point of breathlessness. The gut-wrenching tearing of gears at the first movement's dramatic climax sounds merely efficient

this time around (listen starting at 7'50"), and König underplays the cataclysm that follows the Funeral March's fugal section (beginning at around 7'46"). In the Scherzo, the strings leave quite a few loose threads dangling, and there's some scraggly playing early on in the finale as well.

If you want to hear König and his band hitting their stride, start with the Fourth. There's ample mystery in the introductory *Adagio*, a fizzy *Allegro vivace*, exquisite wind solos in the slow movement and an impishly industrious finale. I do wish greater care was taken to observe *piano* markings in the various appearances of the second theme (initially at 0'30"), especially as there's some highly effective quiet playing here and there in the set. Try, for example, at 4'25" in the *Andante con moto* of the Fifth, where the Luxembourgers create the most delicate and diaphanous pillow for the winds to float on. Indeed, although it takes a while to find its footing, the Fifth develops into a respectable performance. There are more cogent accounts of the opening movement, to be sure, but even if König's reading adds some turbulence to the music's unswerving trajectory, it eventually hits home with the requisite scatter of sparks. The horns' fanfares in

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

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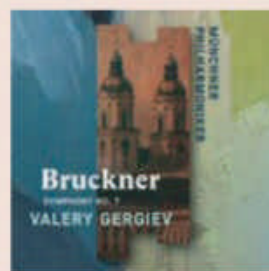
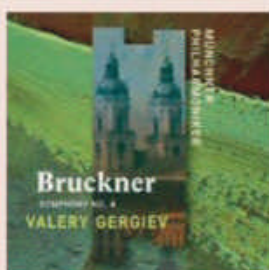
(1877/78 version with 1880 finale)

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Münchner Philharmoniker © MPHIL0018

(69' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Stiftsbasilika St Florian,
Austria, September 26, 2017

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Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

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Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

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Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

© MPHIL0021 (72' • DDD)

Recorded live, September 25 & 26, 2019

After a decidedly uneven start to their St Florian recordings of Bruckner's nine numbered symphonies, Valery Gergiev and the Munich Philharmonic have hit their straps with Nos 4-7. The engineers, too, appear to have learnt from experience. A good deal of shrewdly placed spot-miking brings out every chirp and tweet in the Scherzo of the Fourth before the hunters' brazen steeds come thundering by. The conductor's all-too-vocal contributions to previous

instalments have been discreetly minimised without losing a sense of the liveness of both the abbey acoustic and the occasion.

Gergiev has the full measure of the Fourth. That much was evident from the 2015 recording (11/16) made live in the orchestra's acoustically suboptimal Gasteig home at his inaugural concerts as music director. While its proportions are recognisable, the new version is finer still, especially in his patient assembly of the finale's disparate elements towards a deeply rewarding apotheosis.

Even here, however, in the steady climb towards the movement's first peak (2'32"), there are signs of the wayward pulse that is the Achilles heel of Gergiev's Bruckner. Breathing space is written into the ink and paper of these scores, but at points such as the end of the Seventh's opening theme the conductor cannot resist adding more of his own. The mighty blows that bring the outer panels of the Fifth to rest feel too elongated, at once self-consciously placed and insufficiently prepared.

Those points of arrival are all the more disappointing for the palpable conviction and clarity of design that brought us to them. You might anticipate – at any rate, I did after a frankly horrible Third (8/18) – that Gergiev would mix and mute the primary colours and sharp edges of the building blocks to the Fifth's opening movement: in fact he pays them every respect, and primes his canvas with high dynamic contrasts (almost inaudible opening pizzicatos) before applying a sweetly moulded singing line which until recently was highly prized in this music.

However, poking around and opening up inner detail isn't the same as filling the landscape with a single, human drama, and the performance loses momentum in the run-up (more accurately, series of false starts) to the movement's recapitulation which, admittedly, finds Bruckner at his most elliptical. The slow movement also drags its heels, rather too much in love with its gorgeous unfolding of the second theme (the Seventh suffers at the same point) to notice the odd and private and terse aspects of this uncharacteristic *Adagio*. The Scherzo and its slow Ländler are magnificently trenchant, and once past an excessively legato articulation of the double fugue, the finale's contrapuntal texture is expertly handled.

The Sixth has recently enjoyed a string of highly individual recordings from Rattle, Haitink, Järvi and others. Currently my favourite among them is the performance that turned out to be Jansons's penultimate appearance with the Berlin Philharmonic (on the BPO's own label, 3/20), but the patience, the firm grip and the keen rhythmic pointing of Gergiev's reading place it in distinguished company. Even while lingering over the *nobilmente* funeral-march theme at the heart of the *Adagio*, he underpins it with a firm bass tread – the acoustic plays its part, no doubt – before returning in the Scherzo to the promisingly measured sense of purpose that raised the curtain on the symphony's opening *Majestoso*.

Anyone conducting Bruckner with the Munich Philharmonic has Celibidache-sized boots to step into, or over, and even in these latter instalments of the cycle it isn't always clear – especially in some bland and sluggish stretches of the Seventh – that Gergiev has yet made this music his own. There are promises of films and a book to mark the release of the cycle complete. In the meanwhile, the Fourth and Sixth are accounts to reckon with by anyone's standards. **G**

the Scherzo are rousingly lusty and there's a real sense of celebration in the finale. Granted, König's tempo in the latter is even faster than the metronome mark, so some of the playing is a scramble, and he forgoes the exposition repeat – who knows why – but what an exciting victory lap it is. Listen, say, to how the strings make their tremolandos bristle at 4'32", giving dimensionality and edge to a sound that normally blends into the background.

But to my ears the Sixth is the prize here. König goes for Beethoven's spirited metronome marking in the first movement, yet because he phrases with the slow-changing harmonies rather than the bar lines, one feels buoyed by joyousness and not merely hustled along. His 'Scene by the Brook' is tender and dewy, with supple string-playing from a group whose modest tone allows lovely details to emerge – like the horn and bassoon's shared countermelody at 5'33". Note, too, the violins' marvellous fragility when they first intone the finale's song of thanksgiving, and then to their profoundly touching *sotto voce* near the end.

The Seventh and Eighth are the kind of performances one might be happy to encounter in the concert hall, but aren't so memorable as to inspire rehearing. On the positive side, there's supple, shapely phrasing, a delight in the music's harmonic legerdemain and a solid sense of line and architecture. But both performances also feature untidy playing and problems in orchestral balance exacerbated by an overly reverberant acoustic. Where, say, in the recapitulation of the first movement of the Eighth, did the tune (in the cellos, basses and bassoons) disappear to? Beethoven may whip up an enormous peak of F major to welcome back the opening melody after the hither and thither of the development section, but surely he didn't mean to bury it. And while he may have been poking fun at Maelzel's metronome in the *Allegretto scherzando*, he marked the relentless ticking of the woodwinds *pianissimo* so they wouldn't dominate as they do rather relentlessly here.

As for the Ninth, König's interpretation has me stymied. Is the first movement meant to sound so perky? There are arrestingly dark moments – the aching tug of the violins's dissonant notes at 2'59", say – but mostly it's disconcertingly sunny. I crave more weight and darkness from the strings in the Scherzo, too, particularly near the end (at 11'38"), and greater poise in the *Adagio* (why so chaotically breathless at 7'40"?). To be frank, the finale is a mess. The lower strings' recitative is all over the place, the baritone soloist sounds seriously

overparted, the tenor lags behind in the *alla marcia* and the fugue is a muddle.

The overtures are also a mixed bag, I'm afraid. *Leonore* No 3 and *Fidelio* are solidly played, though unremarkable; *Coriolan* is slack and never seems to be softer than *mezzo-forte*; *Egmont* is also unrelievedly loud but has some fire to it, at least. I've never found Barry Cooper's realisation of the Tenth Symphony all that compelling and König's account hasn't changed my mind, though it's reasonably well played. Honestly, having heard the set several times through now, the only performance I can imagine revisiting is the Sixth. There are dozens of *Pastorals* that are more beautifully played (and recorded), of course, but this one offers something special of its own. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Britten

Sinfonia da Requiem, Op 20

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra /

Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla

DG © 483 9072 (20' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Elbharmonie,

Hamburg, October 7-9, 2019



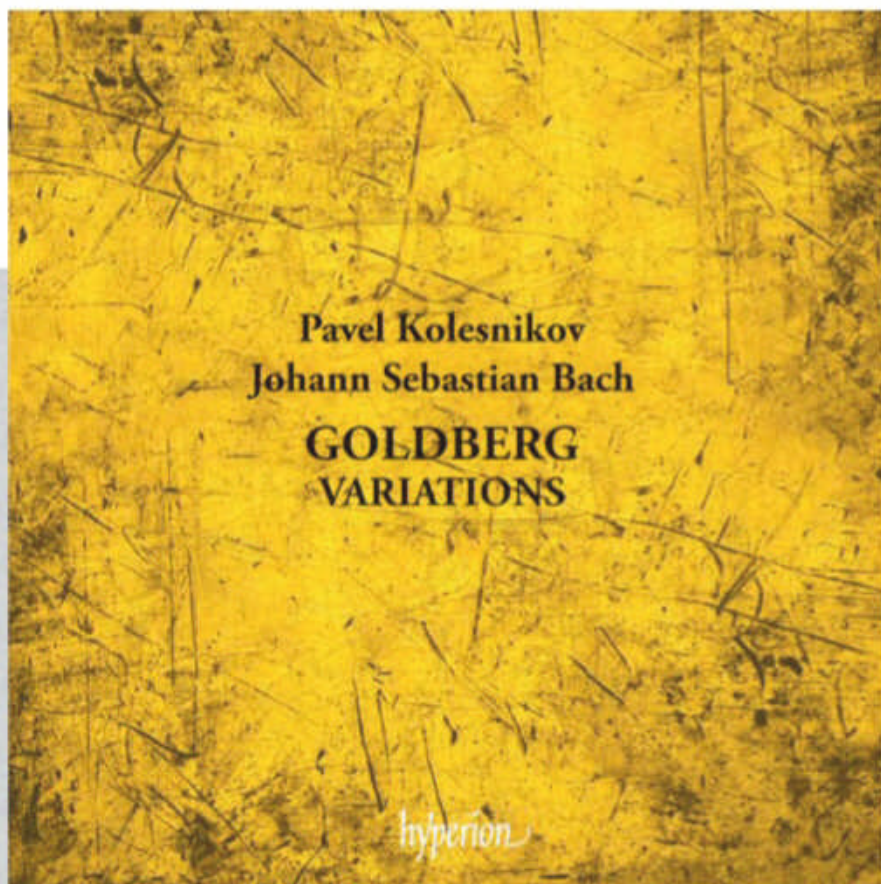
Capitalising on Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla and the CBSO's Record of the Year triumph at

this year's *Gramophone* Awards, this purely digital release – a growing trend – gives notice of a two-CD release (scheduled for March next year) entitled 'The British Project'. Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, Walton and Holst are in prospect.

As teasers go, Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* is a banger, conscientious objection hurled down with that thunderous opening chord where rasping trombones repeatedly underline the catastrophe of the Second World War. Britten's precocious symphony (his first large-scale and purely orchestral utterance) has the angry air of a protest piece tempered with hope. It's a young man's piece, idealistic to a fault and to some extent an over-simplification of what war and peace actually mean – but my goodness does it flex muscle.

Gražinytė-Tyla and the CBSO tick all the boxes, the outer movements lavishly contrasting the melancholy of loss in the former (the plangent alto saxophone in the first is such a 20th-century colour for mourning) with a kind of new dawn emerging from the shining climax of the latter. Between them is the most scarifyingly individual music in the piece – a 'Day of Wrath' whose ugly cynicism

hyperion



'Intense, emotional and pure' is how Pavel Kolesnikov describes the experience of making this recording, the fruits of a collaboration with the choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. The spirit of the dance is never far away in this compelling account.

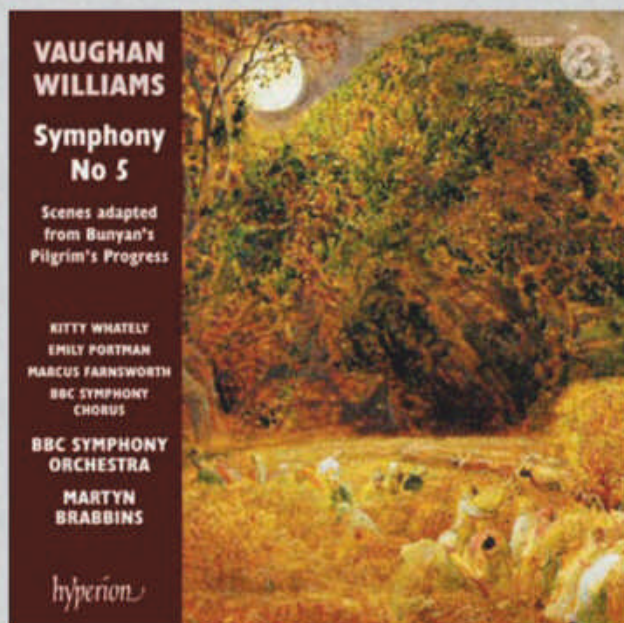
CDA68338
Available Friday 30 October 2020

Bach: Goldberg Variations
PAVEL KOLESNIKOV piano

RVW's first thoughts on 'The Pilgrim's Progress' are an apt coupling for an outstanding interpretation of his Symphony No 5.

CDA68325
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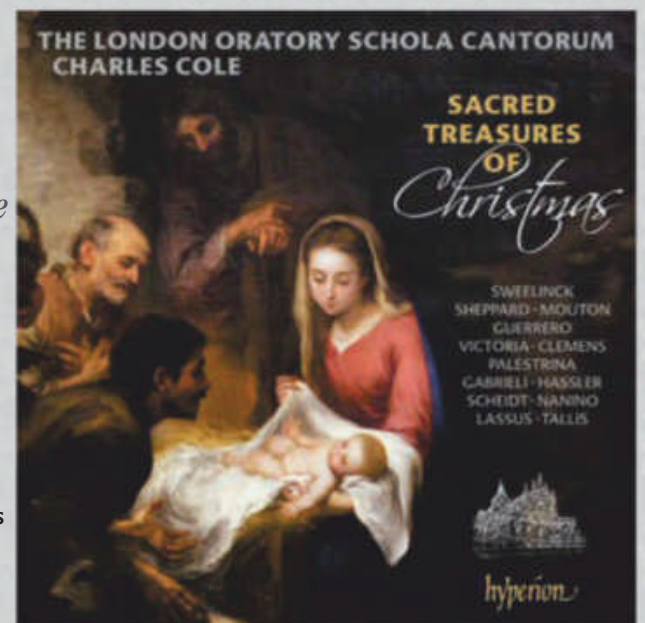
Vaughan Williams: Symphony No 5 & Scenes adapted from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress
BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MARTYN BRABBINS conductor



A celebration of Christmas across sixteenth-century Europe: Renaissance polyphony at its finest.

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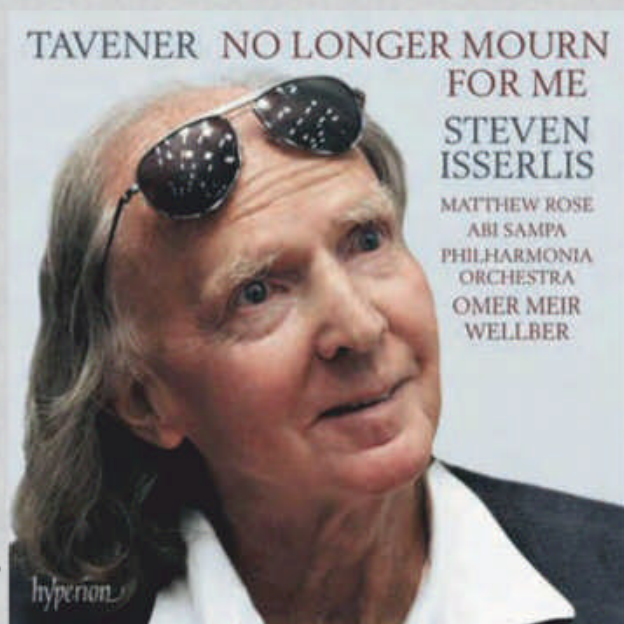
Sacred treasures of Christmas
THE LONDON ORATORY SCHOLA CANTORUM
CHARLES COLE conductor



An important release which again demonstrates Steven Isserlis's deep commitment to the music of John Tavener.

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Tavener: No longer mourn for me & other works for cello
STEVEN ISSERLIS cello



Music to illustrate the Golden Age: a selection of motets from the time of Philip II.

CDA68359
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Sacred treasures of Spain
THE LONDON ORATORY SCHOLA CANTORUM
CHARLES COLE conductor



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combines a dance of death of sorts with an almost comical slapstick. In fact Britten actually uses a slapstick (a favourite of his) in his percussion section culminating in a passage that is at once an evocation of convulsive death-throe spasms and a demonic snickering. The CBSO throw it off with all due virtuosity and sonically the DG engineering is exceptional. 'The British Project' is go. **Edward Seckerson**

Caravassilis · Corigliano · Siegel

Caravassilis Saudade Corigliano Troubadours Siegel Chaconne

Jakob Bangsø gtr

Tallinn Chamber Orchestra / Kaisa Roose

Orchid © ORC100142 (72' • DDD)



It's always good to see younger guitarists continuing the tradition of

commissioning new concertos for their instrument, especially when the resulting works are as substantial and attractive as the two which here receive their first recordings. Such continuity is made explicit by including Corigliano's *Troubadours*, written for Sharon Isbin, while highlighting the fact that Constantine Caravassilis's and Wayne Siegel's concertos – both written for Bangsø – were partly inspired by the Corigliano. Joanna Wyld in her booklet note also observes that 'the themes of nostalgia and memory recur throughout this album'. And indeed, this provides the key to navigating the eclecticism of these three concertos, which contrast archaic appropriations and bald tonality with bold modernistic tendencies.

There are concertante elements in all three. But the overwhelming effect, especially in Corigliano's *Troubadours*, evokes the image of a wandering poet confronted with the sublime. This chimes well with those 'themes of nostalgia and memory'. *Troubadours* and *Saudade* quote respectively a *trobairitz* song, and a lullaby and Greek folk song; Siegel's *Chaconne* takes an old form, as well as the charming device of having the guitarist hum a tune at the beginning, 'trying to recall a forgotten memory'; it is this tune that forms the ground bass for the entire work. But the theme-and-variations idea also occurs in the other two works.

Bangsø is more guide than lone poet; or, better, a true collaborator, even when in declamatory mode, his playing equal to that of the superb Tallinn Chamber Orchestra under the ever-sensitive Kaisa

Roose. The effect is expressive less of nostalgia and memory than of a sympathetic collective consciousness.

William Yeoman

Coates

'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'

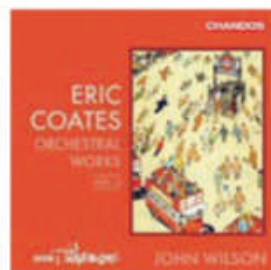
Calling All Workers. The Enchanted Garden.

For Your Delight. Lazy Night. London Bridge.

The Selfish Giant. Summer Days. Wood Nymphs

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson

Chandos © CHAN20148 (57' • DDD)



Eric Coates had a distinct liking for fairy tales, and unless my ears deceive me his

narrative writing sometimes assumes a Wagnerian aspect, at 1'33" into the penultimate movement of *The Enchanted Garden*, for example (echoes of journeyings among the Nibelungs in *Das Rheingold*), or 8'17" into *The Selfish Giant*, where Siegfried's woodbird seems to make a cameo appearance. Plausible, I daresay, but far removed from the more familiar soundtrack that for Coatesians of a certain age such as myself serves to conjure satchels, school blazers, grazed knees and wireless shows such as the long-running *Music While You Work*, where the central melody from the march *Calling All Workers* provided an indelibly memorable theme tune. And what a melody it is.

It's all too easy to cast a glib ear across these wonderful tunes and the enormous creative skill that gave rise to them. If Elgar (sometimes) summoned images of Empire, Coates was a man of the English town and countryside; and this second volume of John Wilson's latest survey of the orchestral works offers beautifully played and knowingly paced renditions of some gorgeous pieces, not all of them present in Coates's own extensive discography. As we know it *The Enchanted Garden* (which was memorably recorded years ago under Stanford Robinson – 12/58) sprang to life on the wings of a commission from the Swedish Broadcasting Company, though as Richard Bratby explains in his excellent notes its roots date back to an unpublished ballet based on the story of *The Seven Dwarfs*. It's made up of seven brief interlinking movements, the form intended as a ballet, but the actual effect is more like a tone poem. Had Coates himself recorded it I doubt he'd have done a better job than John Wilson and the BBC Philharmonic do here, which is in general marginally more vivid than his first recording of the work with the BBC Concert Orchestra (ASV)

and has rather more of a swing to it than Barry Wordsworth's otherwise excellent version with the LPO (Lyrita, 5/07).

Summer Days is another beguiling suite, one that Coates himself did record; and although Coates's characteristic freshness pushes for maximum spontaneity in, say, 'On the Edge of the Lake' (the central section specifically), Wilson's equally affectionate but more refined approach on this, his second recording of the work (his first is on Avie, 8/05), allied to Chandos's beautifully balanced recording, transports the music from a specific time and place to a wider context, and no matter where or when. Coates himself was incomparable in the faster, more bracing pieces such as *London Bridge* and yet Wilson and his BBC players level with him (whether in 1934 or 1937) for brilliance, busyness and panache. Other pieces programmed, all of them feel-good classics, are *Lazy Night*, *Wood Nymphs* and *For Your Delight*. A terrific disc, then, and a delectable appetiser for Vol 3.

Rob Cowan

LeFanu

Columbia Falls^a. The Crimson Bird^b.

The Hidden Landscape^c. Threnody^d

^bRachel Nicholls sop ^{bc}BBC Symphony Orchestra /

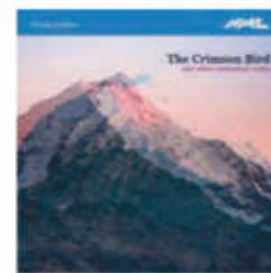
^cNorman Del Mar, ^bIlan Volkov; ^{ad}RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra / ^dGavin Maloney,

^aColman Pearce

NMC © NMCD255 (76' • ^cADD/DDD)

Recorded live at the ^cRoyal Albert Hall, London, August 7, 1973; ^{ad}National Concert Hall, Dublin,

^aSeptember 19, 1997, ^dJanuary 13, 2015; ^bBarbican, London, February 17, 2017



The works of Nicola LeFanu (b1947) have not been overlooked in terms of recording,

albeit often appearing with those by her mother Elizabeth Maconchy or husband David Lumsdaine. A Naxos release (4/05) gave a decent overview of her output for chamber ensemble, and this new NMC does likewise for her orchestral music stretching back over nearly half a century.

That LeFanu possesses an ear for finesse is evident from *The Hidden Landscape* (1973), with its oblique yet purposeful trajectory from the ominous, even confrontational to a gauntly imposing climax and expectant close. Even greater subtlety is found in *Columbia Falls*, seamlessly fusing diverse gestures before it reaches its almost cinematic culmination. If both these pieces exude a certain impersonal quality, the plangent immediacy of *Threnody* (2014) is

never in doubt. Nor is that of *The Crimson Bird* (2017), described by the composer as a ‘concertante work’ in which John Fuller’s text charts a course from a mother’s contentment, through the violent onset of civil conflict then impassioned outcry in the absence of her son, to her ultimate lamentation via the cumulative force of the closing passacaglia. Throughout, Rachel Nicholls renders the powerfully rhetorical soprano part with unwavering conviction.

How astute to feature the premiere of the earliest piece under Norman Del Mar; and if that by Louis Frémaux of *Columbia Falls* would have been worthwhile in the City of Birmingham Symphony’s centenary, Colman Pearce is as perceptive here as Gavin Maloney in *Threnody*, and Ilan Volkov proves no less responsive in the title-work. Detailed annotations and a timely addition to the LeFanu discography, hopefully to be followed by one or other of her operas. **Richard Whitehouse**

Mahler

Symphony No 7

Lille National Orchestra / Alexandre Bloch

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA592 (74' • DDD)



During a long association with founding conductor Jean-Claude

Casadesus, the Orchestre National de Lille tended to be associated with Gallic fare. Even Alexandre Bloch, music director from the start of the 2016-17 season, played safe repertoire-wise during the orchestra’s UK tour last January, its first for many years. Might pitching Mahler to an international audience prove a step too far?

The band appears to have developed a more intelligible take on the composer since immortalising its live *Resurrection* under Casadesus (Evidence, 2/17). Lille’s first recorded Seventh is as fresh and bass-light as could have been expected. But it is also racy, inelegant (where appropriate) and determined to do justice to the work’s expressive variety. True, the slightly pinched quality of wind and brass in the *Adagio* introduction presages some tendency to foreground strings and snatch at detail. That phrase-endings can recede into the melee may reflect an acoustic oddity of the Auditorium du Nouveau Siècle; the recorded sound as such seems well judged, neither too immediate nor overly resonant. The visceral engagement of the ensemble grows as the performance proceeds, more than justifying a place on

the shortlist for *Gramophone*’s 2020 Orchestra of the Year.

The main body of the first movement displays abundant snap and crackle with no lack of languishing sentimentality at the approach of the second subject. The ‘Night Music’ movements are deft and fantastical, the second kept on the move without loss of charm. Leonard Bernstein, whose ardent 1966 New York template seems influential elsewhere, takes a much broader line. Bloch’s central Scherzo will surely turn heads as Bernstein’s once did, here exuberant as much as scary, the winds having long overcome any initial reticence.

Objectively speaking the quick-fire finale should probably sound less frisky, more Wagnerian. Still, it’s all great fun, the roller coaster ride never less than carefully characterised from first – the timpanist on energetic form – to last – a rowdy profusion of bells. Not flawless perhaps but hugely promising, sometimes thrilling and a long way from the forensic anonymity that too often passes muster in this repertoire. **David Gutman**

Selected comparison:

New York PO, Bernstein (6/66^R) (SONY) 88697 94333-2

Mozart • Silvestrov

‘The Messenger’

Mozart Piano Concerto No 20, K466^a.

Fantasias – K397; K475 Silvestrov Two

Dialogues with Postscript^a. The Messenger (^asolo/orchestral versions)

Hélène Grimaud *pf*^a Camerata Salzburg

DG Ⓢ 483 7853GH; Ⓢ ② ● 483 8258GH2

(79' • DDD)



As pairings go, Mozart and Silvestrov is pretty inspired. And within each half of Hélène

Grimaud’s programme the works are thoughtfully chosen: Mozart in the minor mode, followed by a series of typically nostalgic Silvestrov miniatures, all suggesting an imaginary dialogue with the past. But another pairing on the disc is more problematic: that of Grimaud’s ego and her programme.

Self-indulgence served up as spirituality is a not uncommon trend these days and ‘concept albums’ are a prime symptom. For some time now Grimaud has been purveyor-in-chief: ‘Credo’, ‘Reflection’, ‘Water’, ‘Memory’ and now ‘The Messenger’. Of course there is no problem with themed programmes as such; some even, as Jed Distler wrote of Grimaud’s previous album, are ‘perfect for calm

background music or a massage session’ (10/18). But some, like ‘The Messenger’, are so much about the performer’s image that the music is sacrificed.

It starts with the album’s babbling booklet notes, which offer a string of quotes and thoughts from Grimaud but no useful insight into the works. This feels like a lazy way around the problem of there being so little Silvestrov scholarship in the West. Even so, perhaps self-regard could be forgiven if the music-making itself was profound. Alas. From stabbing *fortes* in the fantasies, to lack of communication with the orchestra in the concerto, to random asynchronisations and over-peddallings, Grimaud’s Mozart seems to be bad-tempered and steroid-fuelled. Intensity and tempestuous temperament, which some indulgent critics associate with her, are no excuse for uglifying Mozart. Argerich (with Abbado), for instance, shows that it is possible to have a hurricane-like temperament but still to retain charm and stylishness.

One fortunate outcome of Grimaud’s over-robust Mozart is that her Silvestrov at least sounds comparatively peaceful and still. Possibly for a newcomer to his musical universe, her interpretations would be intriguing enough. But her failure to exercise restraint betrays her lack of affinity with the composer’s language, at least in these extraordinarily introvert and enigmatic works. While *The Messenger* alludes to Mozart, in *Two Dialogues with Postscript* Silvestrov turns to Schubert and Wagner. Alas the Schubertian ‘Wedding Waltz’ in the hands of Grimaud and the Salzburg Camerata substitutes drunken lurching for lilt.

In fact there is nothing enigmatic about what Silvestrov demands from his performer: the score of *The Messenger*, with nuances ranging from *mp* to *pppp*, is replete with meticulously detailed instructions. For a rendition that follows these to the letter, and respects Silvestrov’s request to make the piano as muffled and quiet as possible (keeping the lid closed, using soft pedal), Alexei Lubimov provides the most authoritative interpretations available, both of the piano solo version and the one for piano and strings. Here is an artist truly in the service of the composer, acting as his messenger between the here and now and the beyond and bygone. **Michelle Assay**

Mozart Concerto – selected comparison:

Argerich, Orch Mozart, Abbado (3/14) (DG) 479 1033GH

Silvestrov Messenger – selected comparisons:

Lubimov (7/02) (ECM) 461 812-2

Lubimov, Munich CO, Poppen (11/07) (ECM) 476 6178



Inspired pairing: Hélène Grimaud's latest themed album couples Mozart with the Ukrainian composer Valentyn Silvestrov

Nickel

Oboe Concerto^a. Oboe d'amore Concerto^b. Bass Oboe Concerto^c

Mary Lynch ^aob^bob d'amore^c **Harrison Linsey**
bass oboe **Northwest Sinfonia / David Sabee**
Avie Ⓢ AV2433 (69' • DDD)



He may be best known through his sizeable output for television (dramas and documentaries) but Christopher Tyler Nickel (b1978) has also created a notable and often ambitious range of concert works. These concertos find him at pains to bring out the character of each instrument.

Not that the Oboe Concerto (2012) is demonstrably inferior to those which follow, even if its half-hour duration arguably over-extends the thematic content. The opening movement finds soloist and orchestra locked in confrontation that builds to a visceral climax, then the central *Andante* exudes a haunting wistfulness whose lambent harmonies find potent contrast in the rhythmic trenchancy characterising the final *Allegro*. More convincingly shaped,

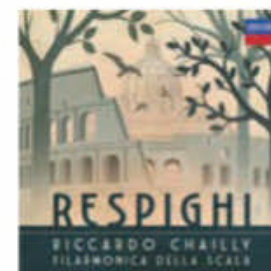
however, is the Oboe d'amore Concerto (2014) – the eloquent first movement evincing an unease that pervades its fantasia-like successor as it heads methodically and remorselessly to a plangent cadenza which, in turn, leads into an affecting recollection of the opening music. Outwardly more conventional, the Bass Oboe Concerto (2016) initially pursues a teasing equivocation that ventures on to deeper emotion in the central *Adagio*; its wistful poise is countered with an agitated final *Allegro* whose deadpan humour feels not a little ominous towards the end.

These substantial, often engaging works are accorded full justice by the soloists for whom they were conceived. Mary Lynch performs feats of agility on her brace of instruments, then Harrison Linsey endows the bass oboe with soulfulness and gravitas. David Sabee secures a committed response from the Northwest Sinfonia (strings especially lustrous in those latter two pieces), captured in an ample but never diffuse ambience. Well worth investigating, not least by adaptable oboists looking for music to challenge themselves and intrigue audiences. **Richard Whitehouse**

Respighi

Ancient Airs and Dances – Suite No 3. Aria for Strings. Di sera^a. Fontane di Roma. Leggenda^b. Pini di Roma

^a**Armel Descotte**, ^a**Gianni Viero** *obs*
^b**Francesco De Angelis** *vn* **Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Riccardo Chailly**
Decca Ⓢ 485 0415 (73' • DDD)



To anyone who remembers the scintillating BBC Proms debut of the Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala in 2017, this album will come highly anticipated. Under Riccardo Chailly's precise direction, Respighi's technicoloured postcards from Rome burst into life and teemed with detail, even in the cavernous Royal Albert Hall.

Alas, detail is what is missing in the *Pines* and *Fountains* here. Recorded in the Fondazione Teatro alla Scala's Sala Abanella at the northern end of Milan, rather than in the famous opera house, the cloudy acoustic scuppers some very fine playing. The Decca album is recorded at a high level and is bass-heavy, but the brass

attack is blunted and much woodwind colour goes missing in action. Turn to the excellent recent Chandos effort, conducted by John Wilson, and it's like having your ears syringed as Respighi's vivid orchestral palette suddenly comes alive.

These are still enjoyable performances – there's an excellent trumpet in the Catacombs and the cor anglais solo that launches the finale of *Pines* is beautifully shaped, although the march cannot compete with Wilson's thrilling yomp along the Appian Way. For sheer sparkle, though, Antonio Pappano and his Santa Cecilia on their home turf are irresistible.

In between the two Roman tourist trails, Chailly explores a few interesting byways. The *Aria for Strings* (1901) is an early, affectionate nod towards the Baroque, years ahead of his three suites of *Ancient Airs and Dances*. The *Leggenda* (1902) was one of six pieces for violin and piano, heard here in orchestral guise and sumptuously played by Francesco De Angelis. There's further faux-Baroque noodling in *Di sera*, a dainty piece for two oboes and strings which is a pleasant discovery. The Third Suite of *Ancient Airs and Dances* is also gentle, but swamped in the warm-bath acoustic. **Mark Pullinger**

Fontane di Roma, Pini di Roma – selected comparisons:
S Cecilia Orch, Pappano (11/07) (WARN) 394429-2
Sinf of London, Wilson (10/20) (CHAN) CHSA5261

Rott

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'

Hamlet Overture. Orchestra Prelude.

Pastoral Prelude. Prelude to 'Julius Caesar'.

Suites – in B flat; in E

Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne / Christopher Ward
Capriccio © C5408 (52' • DDD)



In addition to the symphony that so markedly influenced Gustav Mahler,

Hans Rott (1858-84) composed a number of other orchestral works during his short life, most of which have been recorded before but not presented together, as they are on this absorbing Capriccio release. The one piece that's entirely new here is the *Hamlet Overture*, which Rott commenced in 1876 but never completed. However, the existence of an orchestral draft of the first half and a piano reduction of the second has allowed the musicologist Johannes Volker Schmidt to make a detailed and effective reconstruction. It's a striking piece, clearly influenced by Mendelssohn and Wagner but notably

stylish and assured for a work by an 18-year-old composer.

The author of the booklet note is slightly dismissive about the *Orchestra Prelude* and the two Suites, both of which were written as academic exercises while Rott was a student at the Vienna Conservatory. It's true the Prelude is an inconsequential piece but the suites are imbued with personality and, in the case of the fugue that closes the Suite in B flat, a boisterous sense of humour. By contrast, the *Prelude to 'Julius Caesar'* is highly dramatic, Rott's enthusiasm for Wagner once again making itself felt. Composed between 1877 and 1880, the *Pastoral Prelude* is among the very last works that Rott completed. The atmospheric first half, which contains hints of Rott's teacher Bruckner, leads to an extrovert fugue and an unashamedly celebratory conclusion, capped with multiple cymbal crashes.

Christopher Ward and his players deliver polished and enthusiastic performances of Rott's scores and the recording is satisfyingly detailed and expansive. The booklet note is informative, although the English version of the original German text is occasionally unidiomatic and not as easy to follow as it could be.

Christian Hoskins

Shostakovich

Symphony No 11, 'The Year 1905', Op 103

London Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vladimir Jurowski

LPO © LPO0118 (59' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, December 11, 2019



Hard on the heels of John Storgårds's thrilling account of Shostakovich's

Eleventh Symphony with the BBC Philharmonic comes another performance I was lucky enough to experience live in December last year. And a marked distinction in approach is immediately apparent, in terms of both the sound picture and the musical realisation. If we are talking in pictorial terms, it's a case of Storgårds's panning shot versus Jurowski's more detailed close-up. The LPO engineering is more immediate, the Chandos more self-evidently widescreen. The snow-covered Winter Palace Square may be eerily still but Jurowski moves the music forwards, less concerned about the purely pictorial and more focused on the musical. The uneasy timpani ostinato is key here and

the first of the revolutionary songs – the thematic fabric of this score – declare their identity.

Jurowski recalls those songs as only a Russian could; their melancholy is personal. He is plainly set on dismissing once and for all the notion held by some that this marvellous piece is little more than glorified movie music. Those naysayers have never glimpsed its soul, the subtext of its history. And despite or even because of all its graphic imagery, Jurowski and the recent Storgårds make us deeply aware of that subtext in very particular ways.

There is urgency and heat in Jurowski's reading, and come the Bloody Sunday massacre at the fulcrum of the piece he seems to accentuate that it is music's most methodical and rigorous form – the fugue – which Shostakovich uses to drive us towards systematic slaughter. The thunderous assault of the solo percussion is brutally immediate. But again it is typical of Jurowski that the 'white-out' to icy silence in its wake is as shocking as the assault itself. It takes a second or two to register that there is sound at all.

The slow-movement 'in memoriam' is a wonderful example of Shostakovich saying so much with so little on the page, and Jurowski respects and inhabits its air of communal mourning right up to the major-key modulation in the violins late in the movement, which conveys more hope than a thousand words could. But the mourning will persist and the obliterating crash of the tam-tam in the finale gives way to perhaps the single most heartbreaking moment of lamentation in all Shostakovich – the great cor anglais solo. Characteristically, Jurowski gives his player leave to make this the heart and soul of this piece – but he also pulls focus on the serpentine bass clarinet solo that so rudely interrupts it to signal unease, unrest, resistance.

The all-important church bells of the coda are again (as with Storgårds) borrowed from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic who commissioned them, and thrilling they are. But unlike Storgårds – and I think preferable – Jurowski goes for an abrupt cut-off at the close rather than a prolonged resonance (which applause is likely to violate anyway). For me it is the abruptness that tells us unequivocally that history will repeat itself. I wouldn't want to choose between these two highly distinctive performances but sonically speaking there's no question that Chandos wins the day.

Edward Seckerson

Selected comparison:

BBC PO, Storgårds (6/20) (CHAN) CHSA5278

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Sibelius

Symphonies – No 1, Op 39; No 3, Op 52

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra /

Owain Arwel Hughes

Rubicon ⑤ RCD1055 (73' • DDD)



Like Edward Seckerson, I was greatly impressed by the recent recording

of Sibelius's First Symphony conducted by Santtu-Matias Rouvali. Here is a performance of similar grip, vitality and communicative power. Although slightly slower than most conductors in the first movement, Owain Arwel Hughes maintains tension at a high level and the return of the *Allegro energico* theme in the recapitulation is absolutely thrilling. Like Rouvali, Hughes also provides an interpretation that's splendidly articulate and vivid, the symphony sounding more original and forward-looking than usual as a result, an effect especially pronounced in the faster passages of the *Andante*. There's even a brief anticipation of the opening of the Fourth Symphony in the writing for bassoons, cellos and double basses just after fig I (5'30") in the first movement. Unlike Rouvali, whose management of dynamics occasionally draws attention to itself, Hughes gives us a very direct performance of the score, free of any interpretative exaggeration. The playing of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is first class in all departments, with yearningly expressive strings in the finale's big theme and a notably propulsive contribution from the timpani.

Hughes's account of the Third Symphony is equally compelling, clarity and expression once again hallmarks of the interpretation. There's a strong sense of exhilaration in the first movement and poignancy in the second, aided by the deeply felt playing of the woodwinds. In the finale, Hughes builds the movement to a stirring conclusion, the pace slightly more measured than the otherwise similarly lucid account by Osmo Vänskä, but also more powerful, underpinned by some standout playing from the brass. With the recording in the experienced hands of producer Andrew Keener and engineer Phil Rowlands, it's no surprise that the sound quality is as commendable as the musicianship. Altogether a terrific start to Rubicon's new cycle of the Sibelius symphonies. **Christian Hoskins**

Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:

Gothenburg SO, Rouvali (3/19) (ALPH) ALPHA440

Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:

Minnesota Orch, Vänskä (9/16) (BIS) BIS2006

Tavener

The Death of Ivan Ilyich^a. Mahámátar^b.

No longer mourn for me^c. Popule meus^d.

Preces and Responses^c

Steven Isserlis vc

with ^aMatthew Rose bass ^bAbi Sampa Sufi sngr

^cCaroline Dearnley, ^cChiara Enderle, ^cMatthew

Huber, ^cVashti Hunter, ^cBartholomew LaFollette,

^cAmy Norrington, ^cDavid Waterman vcs

^bTrinity Boys Choir; ^{abd}Philharmonia Orchestra /

Omer Meir Wellber

Hyperion ⑤ CDA68246 (72' • DDD • T)



Here is a disc that proves to be much more than the sum of its parts. At first

sight, it appears to be something of a patchwork, with arrangements for cello ensemble of two of Tavener's choral works (the *Preces and Responses* and *No longer mourn for me*) surrounding three more substantial compositions. But in fact Steven Isserlis has understood how to draw out the vocal quality in both those pieces and adapt it superbly for the eight cellos, to the extent that even the instrumental performance of what would be the precentor's intonations in the first sounds extraordinarily natural and 'breathed'.

The Death of Ivan Ilyich is certainly the most challenging piece here. It is based on a short story by Tolstoy and is a 'monodrama' in the line of *The Immurement of Antigone* and *Eis Thanaton* (though the latter is not so described). Like them, it is austere in the extreme, highly concentrated and uncompromising, with moments of luminous beauty breaking through the darkness; the effort is worth making. The piece that really stands out, however, is *Mahámátar*, which features the Sufi singer Abi Sampa, who improvises in her own tradition above music derived from the received Byzantine chant for the Great Litany from the Eucharistic Liturgy (any Greek chanter will pick this up immediately). The cumulative effect is overwhelming. *Popule meus*, an entirely instrumental work, is hardly less impressive, however.

This beautifully recorded disc is enriched enormously by Steven Isserlis's very personal booklet notes – it is very important to have this kind of testimony, and makes of this release a genuinely historical document as well as a vibrant new contribution to the Tavener discography.

Ivan Moody

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 5, Op 64.

Francesca da Rimini, Op 32

Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

Alpha ⑤ ALPHA659 (74' • DDD)



On the cover of this Tchaikovsky Fifth, a smiling Paavo Järvi seems to indicate

that all will be well. And his words in the promo for this first disc in his Tchaikovsky cycle with his new charges, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, are sanguine: 'I think of vulnerability and hope. It looks directly into our soul ... Unlike the Sixth, the Fifth still holds out hope for life.' The Fifth doesn't stare into the abyss and sink to its knees like the *Pathétique*, but Fate dogs every movement and I find the finale, stoically marching onward, taking adversity on the chin, as unbearably moving as anything in Tchaikovsky's final symphony. So does Järvi's Fifth offer hope or does it all end in tears?

For the most part, this is a dry-eyed, disciplined account. Järvi sets a moderate tempo for the first movement, meticulously observing hairpin dynamics, the strings using the occasional – tasteful – portamento. Indeed, it's the strings that make the telling impression here, big sighs not of emotion but of wistful remembrance amid the woodwind chatter. And there's a lovely moment in the recap of the *Molto più tranquillo* (from 12'57") where Järvi gets the violins to play even softer (bar 432) than the preceding one – a magical moment, as if they're fearful, catching their breath. There's a touch of doom in the lower string swells of the closing bars, a hint of drama to come.

The horn solo in the *Andante cantabile* glows, displaying superb dynamic control. Järvi lets the music flow but builds up a nice head of steam without allowing the Tonhalle brass to obliterate the music. By largely playing the score straight, it helps Tchaikovsky's ritenutos to really tell. Järvi keeps the third-movement Valse on the move, too.

But it's the finale where the drama catches alight. The *Allegro vivace* erupts vigorously but the overall mood seems buoyant. Could we be about to snatch triumph from the jaws of defeat? But Järvi turns the screw hard so the *Molto vivace* (9'15") really lets rip. There's stoicism, yes, in the *molto maestoso* theme but it heralds a headlong rush into the coda's *Presto*, hurtling along until Järvi wrings out the final bars. It's not a Fifth that's as histrionic



Sharing Chinese culture with audiences around the world: guitarist Xuefei Yang and guzheng player Sha Yuan bring boldness and delicacy to *Sketches of China*

as either of Valery Gergiev's recordings (the live Vienna Philharmonic wilder than his more lugubrious, drawn-out Mariinsky account), but it certainly hits the emotional spot and marks an auspicious start to Järvi's Tonhalle Tchaikovsky cycle.

Just when you need to cool off after that sizzling coda of the Fifth, though, it's a case of out of the emotional frying pan and into ... the raging furnace that is the symphonic poem *Francesca da Rimini*. This isn't, in truth, the fieriest *Francesca* out there. It's moderately paced and smoothly balanced – I'd have liked greater brass impact here – but, again, Järvi wrenches the drama from the closing pages, the final bars held for all their worth. **Mark Pullinger**

Symphony No 5 – selected comparisons:
VPO, Gergiev (6/99) (PHIL) 462 905-2PH
Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (MARI) MAR0017

'Sketches of China'

Anonymous Everlasting Longing **Changjun Xu** Sword Dance **Chen Yi** Shuo Chang **Guang Ren** Silver Clouds Chasing the Moon **Qing Xi Weng** The Moon Represents My Heart **Renchang Fu** A Lovely Rose. Dreams of Gulangyu Island **Tan Dun** Seven Desires **Tieshan Liu** Yao Dance **Traditional** A Moonlit Night on the Spring River. Fisherman's Song by Moonlight. Hujia. Three Variations on a Plum Blossom. White Snow in the Spring Sunlight **Wei Qu** Flower Drum

Wen-Chung Chou Three Folk Songs
Yong Ning Camel Bells Along the Silk Road
Xuefei Yang *gtr* with **Weiliang Zhang** *xiao*
Sha Yuan *guzheng* **Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra / Renchang Fu**
Decca/Universal Ⓢ ② 481 9139 (101' • DDD)



Truth, fantasy, boldness and delicacy. Listening to Chinese classical guitarist Xuefei Yang's latest album is like watching a parade of exquisitely rendered beasts on a silk handscroll. 'Sketches of China' (a nod to Miles Davis?) features Chinese classical, folk and modern music from the Han Dynasty to today in orchestral, chamber and solo arrangements, transcriptions or original compositions. Some are the result of commissions; others are by Xuefei herself; all are brought together by 'a desire to share more of my own culture with audiences around the world'.

On two tracks – the opening *A Lovely Rose* and *Dreams of Gulangyu Island* – Xuefei is accompanied by the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra under Renchang Fu, who also arranged the former and composed the latter work. In a handful of others, she is joined by masters Weiliang

Zhang on xiao (a variety of flute) and Sha Yuan on guzheng (plucked zither). Yet while the majority of the pieces are performed on solo guitar, Xuefei possesses an imagination as fluid and expansive as her technique. Such that Xuefei's improvised cadenzas in *A Lovely Rose* capture much of the orchestra's colour and sonority. And the haunting *Hujia* (with xiao) and nostalgia-drenched *Everlasting Longing* (with guzheng) find their echoes in *White Snow in the Spring Sunlight*, *The Moon Represents My Heart* and even Tan Dun's *Seven Desires*.

This despite the all-pervasive spirit of the pipa, which informs Xuefei's near-total mastery of her own instrument. If this gorgeous recording finds its ideal pictorial analogue in a painted scroll, Xuefei Yang's playing can best be compared to the spontaneity and control of a master calligrapher. **William Yeoman**



Bartók's Piano Concerto No 3

Andreas Haefliger talks to Harriet Smith about the challenges posed by this optimistic swansong

How unbelievable it seems that Andreas Haefliger should only now be bringing out his first disc solely devoted to concertos. He's one of those artists who consistently commands impressive reviews yet he's not in any sense a superstar pianist. And nor would he want to be. As he puts it: 'For a long time, I was more concerned about life – busy and working hard as a musician but also busy raising a wonderful daughter who is now 22, and I've just celebrated 33 years of marriage. My parents are no longer alive, so now I'm less beholden to other people and can focus more exclusively on the piano.'

That said, this new disc for BIS, made with the Helsinki PO and Susanna Mälkki, was not without its challenges. As you might expect from a pianist who has long avoided single-composer discs (instead creating fascinating juxtapositions in his slowly evolving Perspectives series), the first decision was what to put alongside Bartók's Third Piano Concerto, which the composer worked on as he approached his death and which was intended as a 42nd-birthday present for his wife Ditta. The choice is inspired: Ravel's Left Hand Concerto – 'for me, the composer's most personal statement, full stop' – and Dieter Ammann's wonderfully effervescent *The Piano Concerto (Gran Toccata)* (2019), written especially for him. 'The initial challenge was to get Dieter to write this piece, and then it took a lot of persuading to get people to accept this combination of works, though everyone seems very happy now.'

Haefliger has been playing Bartók's Third Concerto for more than three decades, and distinctly recalls his first encounter with it. 'I was 24 and it was with the Swiss Youth Symphony Orchestra. I've since played it with many different orchestras and conductors, which is good because it's a piece whose interpretation needs to ripen over many years.'

I ponder if that's perhaps truer of this work than it is of the first two Bartók concertos, which, while ferociously difficult, seem less enigmatic. After all, descriptions of the Third can range from 'blithe' to 'transcendental'.

'For me, the Third is a piece that seems to open the door to another world, one that is basically positive, which is remarkable when you think that Bartók knew he was at death's door. But it's optimistic rather than transcendental – the rhythms are folk ones that he discovered as a young man with Kodály and subsequently used countless times.'



'I played the whole first page only with the thumbs – it really worked'

And, of course, 'transcendental' tends to bring Beethoven's late music to mind. Much has been made of the similarity between the slow movement of the Bartók and the 'Heiliger Danksgesang' central movement of Beethoven's Op 132 String Quartet. 'There's a superficial similarity in the voice-leading (and, incidentally, that opening is terrifically difficult to get right), but then Bartók goes into a sequence that is a semitone up and that gives you this amazing feeling of levitation. The sense I'm trying to capture with the slow movement's opening is one of purity, with the emotion there but not overdone. The alterations to the tempo need to be minimal otherwise it can sound sentimental.'

Another much discussed point is Bartók's marking for the slow movement, *Adagio religioso* – with many keen to surmise that it

indicates a sudden religious epiphany for this committed atheist. Haefliger prefers a more straightforward explanation: 'Even atheists can change their minds near the end, but in my view it's there as a culturally accepted depiction of mood rather than anything else.' One moment within that movement that seems to yield a wide range of interpretations is the sudden flurry of birdsong-like sounds inspired by birds that Bartók had heard while convalescing in Asheville, North Carolina, the previous year. Some pianists see this as quite lyrical, others tend towards the percussive. 'That chord that sets this up is so stunning – it's a kind of *Rite of Spring* moment, because you're hearing so many harmonies, and then you're basically reacting to what the oboe does. The way I play it is partly down to the instrument – whether it's a bright piano or a warmer-sounding one. And then I bear in mind that it's birdsong so shouldn't sound too aggressive. But it's also a wonderful moment of chamber music, with the piano's interplay with flute, oboe and clarinet.'

That's one of many instances of Bartók's genius for scoring; others include the way he uses the two trumpets and trombone so sparingly in the first movement, with the latter appearing in only two bars. 'I think the whole piece benefits from not ever accumulating masses of sound but taking pretty much exactly what's on the page and letting the sound only live as long as you see it there.' So in the piano's very first entry, for instance, Haefliger uses the pedal but only for colour, not to sustain the line. 'When I performed it in Vienna last year, I played the whole first page only with the thumbs and it really worked – it


was very loose and the effect sounded almost like a cimbalom. Those opening bars, with their extraordinary texture two octaves apart, have occupied me for endless hours!’

And given that the theme itself has a folk element to it, presumably there needs to be an inflection as well – there may be four semiquavers on the page, but that doesn’t mean they should all be played equally. ‘Exactly – you have to work out what sounds idiomatic, it’s all about finding the lilt.’

Although the third concerto isn’t overtly a technical tour de force in the way that the first two are, it does have its treacherous passages. But for Haefliger, just as important is the need to make music. ‘What is difficult is not to play the notes but to play them with an ease and beauty and good sound.’ These qualities form leitmotifs in our conversation – hardly surprising given that his father was the great lyric tenor Ernst Haefliger. He also points to passages that don’t necessarily look difficult on the page but which pose unexpected challenges. One such comes in the slow movement after the birdsong section, for instance, where the piano has a high-lying passage of thirds and sixths in decreasing (but precisely notated) note values. ‘It’s so hard to play all the notes and not sound ponderous in any way. Another amazing moment is the closing phrases of the *Adagio religioso*, and there’s that last chord, which is so unexpected: it needs to sound unresolved.’

‘In the finale, it’s a super fugue, really cool, because you have almost the perfect fugal theme. I take my hat off to Bartók’

I wonder how fast Haefliger likes to take the finale, whose marking *Allegro vivace* isn’t Bartók’s own. ‘It’s partly a question of practicality – it’s very hard for the orchestra, so you have to present them with something they can accompany you with. And there has to be a sense of lift.’ And what about the moment where Bartók breaks off into a fugue, brilliantly introduced by timpani: does Haefliger see this as playful or serious? ‘I like to begin it quite strictly, bringing over its rhythmic verve; but when it becomes syncopated (bar 253), that’s where it gets more playful. It’s a super fugue, really cool, because you have almost the perfect fugal theme. I’ve recently been playing Beethoven’s Op 106 Sonata, and I take my hat off to Bartók: if you gave Beethoven’s fugal theme to a church organist to improvise on he’d probably kick you out of the door; but Bartók’s lends itself perfectly to lots of different treatments. Which he then explores – such as introducing the running notes from before at bar 280, which really stick in your ear, or the descending sequence of woodwind entries after that. It’s so inspired!’

Bartók completed all but the last 17 bars of orchestration, which were undertaken by his friend and mentee Tibor Serly. I wonder if Haefliger can sense a different hand at work. ‘No, not at all. Bartók left sketches, so it was just a matter of deciphering his way of putting ideas down.’ Just before that final passage, Bartók throws in one more moment of treachery. ‘The glissandos are actually not that difficult, though if you have to keep redoing them you do start losing skin. But the octaves after those ... when I played them to Hungarian cellist András Fejér of the Takács Quartet, he suggested that they should be unpedalled so they sound really clean. That was really hard!’ 

► Haefliger’s recording of Bartók’s Piano Concerto No 3 is available now on Bis

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Harriet Smith listens to four all-star performances from Verbier: *'Franck's finale bursts in with a quiet fury, the tremolo strings setting up a thrilling sense of propulsion'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



Mark Pullinger on a selection from Daniel Hope's lockdown concerts: *'We're mostly at the light-music end of the spectrum; I particularly enjoyed a swooning rendition of "Moon River"'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**

Beethoven

Three Violin Sonatas, Op 12.

Violin Sonata No 4, Op 23

Frank Peter Zimmermann *vn* Martin Helmchen *pf*

BIS ④ BIS2517 (73' • DDD/DSD)



A special joy of this Beethoven anniversary year has been the opportunity to hear

performers of immense intelligence and experience encountering the young Beethoven: a genius in the raw, sometimes derivative, often startlingly original, but always demanding to be met on his own, irrepressible terms. Now Frank Peter Zimmermann and Martin Helmchen tackle the three Op 12 Violin Sonatas, plus Op 12's spiritual cousin, the A minor Sonata, Op 23. Which way, you wonder, will they approach them – with the benefit of Romantic hindsight or as the culmination of a Classical tradition?

If I had to go for one or the other, I'd say that their approach skews towards the Romantic: not so much two instruments developing a line of thought together as violin and piano taking turns to step into the limelight. Both players deploy their full expressive armoury to grand effect at the opening of Op 12 No 1, and then again in the sweeping, sunlit expanses of Op 12 No 3, before withdrawing into an almost Schumann-like intimacy in the slow movements and quieter rondo episodes. They're never afraid to express themselves poetically or to linger over an expressive moment.

Yet there's a briskness and momentum about all four performances. Rhythms are clearly and springily articulated, and it certainly helps that Helmchen is playing a Chris Maene straight-strung piano – an instrument whose transparency is perfectly suited to playing of such unforced wit and fantasy. The slow movement of Op 12 No 2 has the sense of an improvisation, and there's a delicious throwaway quality to the final pay-off of Op 24. In short,

these performances wed classical verve to a profoundly Romantic spirit, and I suspect that Beethoven would have rather enjoyed the result. **Richard Bratby**

L Buckley

'From Ocean's Floor'

Discordia^a. Exploding Stars^b. Fridur^c.

Haza^d. Kyrie^e. Ó Íochtar Mara^f

Iarla Ó Lionáird *voice*^b Darragh Morgan *vn*

Isabelle O'Connell *pf*^a Joby Burgess *perc*

Linda Buckley *elec*^s Crash Ensemble;

RTÉ ConTempo Quartet

NMC ④ NMCD258 (78' • DDD • T/t)



From Dennehy to Walshe, Ann Cleare to Andrew Hamilton, a slew of Irish voices

have recently caught international attention. Not least among them is Linda Buckley. Based at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Buckley has a style drawing not only on late Romanticism and post-minimalism but also on electronica and traditional Irish music. As evinced on this debut portrait disc, her style is refined and distinctive.

The song-cycle *Ó Íochtar Mara* ('From Ocean's Floor') was composed for the celebrated Irish *sean-nós* singer Iarla Ó Lionáird. Buckley juxtaposes the traditional Irish idiom (she grew up with the music) with string quartet and electronics. Unsurprisingly given the centrality of the folk material, the music tends to stay around one harmonic centre; neo-modal more than neo-tonal. The most beautiful of the cycle is the third song, which translates as 'Sun and Moon': as a lover with quivering voice recalls the transformative power of their beloved, delirious string glissandos and shimmering electronics conjure a luminous vista. Elsewhere, strings crisp and *senza vibrato*, electronics a continuous resonance, the music exudes north European froideur, albeit in a lamenting mood. Dramatising a drowned man addressing his grieving lover,

the fourth movement, based mostly on electronic pads and voice, recalls mid-1990s Warp Records.

Throughout the album, the sound world and pacing are consistently lush and slow. *Fridur* for solo piano and electronics presents a glacial landscape (Iceland, which Buckley regularly visits) in the context of emotional vexation; conflict registers in repeated minor sixths and major ninths, tremolo treble figures and booming reverberant bass. Paradoxically, the album's strength is also at times a drawback: while the stylistic consistency (modal instrumental material, slowness, continuous electronic textures) creates an immersive quality, it also means over 80 minutes there isn't a lot of contrast. Nonetheless, *Haza* for string quartet and electronics shows Buckley's sensitive instrumentation. Poise, balance and registral spacing in the sustained string voices opens a space in which evocative synthetic textures ebb and flow, until eventually the spell breaks with a moment of dense Bartókian polyphony.

Liam Cagney

Dittersdorf • Haydn • Kraus

'Music for a Viennese Salon'

Dittersdorf Duetto, Kr219 Haydn Symphony

No 94, 'Surprise' (arr Salomon) Kraus Flute

Quintet, VB188

Night Music

Avie ④ AV2423 (67' • DDD)



Booklet notes by Steven Zohn set the scene for this disc – an imaginary Viennese salon concert from October 1801 – in stunningly evocative terms. Much of Zohn's impeccable weaving of the historical and the imagined manifests in the tracks themselves. We hear, for example, the blend of 'sweet-sounding, fretted Viennese violone' and 'darker-sounding viola' in Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf's Duetto in E flat. It is a strange sonority that takes some



Classical verve and Romantic spirit: pianist Martin Helmchen and violinist Frank Peter Zimmermann bring wit and fantasy to early Beethoven

getting used to – it's the first duet for viola and violone of conscious design I've come across – but utterly beguiling once one's ears are established in the treble-less southern hemisphere. The central *Adagio* is particularly resplendent, and Heather Miller Lardin's double-stopped accompaniment is a thing of subtle loveliness. A wider rhetorical palette might have been explored in the outer movements: at points it's not obvious if the duo are trying to be refined or slapstick. Some of the playing dwells too long in a polite middle ground when the robust or burlesque were being beckoned; or, quite simply, could the performances be funnier?

The *Allegro moderato* of Joseph Martin Kraus's Quintet in D that opens the album is an unexpected gem. Most extraordinary are the full orchestral textures that this band create: upon the first entry of the flute, we soon reach an exuberant D major chord that gives the first glimpse of what this special scoring can achieve. At its core, a string quartet in its most ordinary guise: a first violinist who fluctuates between virtuosity and song, a second violinist skittishly busy in accompanimental figures, a viola player fuelled on syncopation and

a simple harmonic bass line provided by a cellist. But this is transformed into something special: highlighted by Zohn's vibrant flute-playing, an entire wind section unto itself, and then anchored by sonorous violone, the ensemble more or less achieves the range of a modern-day symphony orchestra. Night Music are most successful in flirting between the two domains that this scoring allows, retreating from orchestral richness into lucid chamber music textures for clever and persuasive effect.

The historical arrangement of Haydn's *Surprise* Symphony by Johann Peter Salomon is certainly interesting but is patchy in what it manages to retain of Haydn's colourful scoring. The famous second movement, which gives the Symphony its nickname, is prosaically played out. But there are flickers of genius: Rebecca Harris's rubato snatched over a whisker-thin bar line, and Zohn's hybrid bird-clock that is quietly delightful. The final movement is excellently shaped and the returning ritornello maintains admirable sprightliness. The reduced forces here work splendidly: the playing is intimate, buoyant with 'empty' space in the texture, and much of it skips by most pleasantly. **Mark Seow**

Frances-Hoad

Cloud Movements^a. Game On^b. Mazurka^c. Medea^d. My Day in Hell^e. Pay Close Attention^f. The Prophecy^g. Songs and Dances^h. The Whole Earth Dancesⁱ

^dSara Minelli fl ^aRozenn Le Trionnaire cl ^aFrancesca Barritt, ^cFenella Humphreys, ^fChristopher Jones vns ^fKay Stephen va ^hDavid Cohen, ^gRebecca Gilliver, ^fAnna Menzies vcs ^hDaniel Grimwood, ^{ac}Sholto Kynoch, ^gSophia Rahman pf ^{bf}Yshani Perinpanayagam pf ^bCommodore 64 ^eGildas Quartet; ⁱSchubert Ensemble Champs Hill © CHRC152 (82' • DDD)



Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b1980) has enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Champs Hill

Records these past few years, this latest release a revealing overview of her extensive chamber output.

Almost all the pieces emerged over the decade 2007-17 – the exception being *The Prophecy* (1998) which, drawing on human irrationality in the face of death, evinces a propulsion and cumulative intensity that speaks very much of youthful uninhibition. At the opposite end of the

spectrum are brief pieces for flute, piano quartet, and violin and piano that touch on more reticent while often ambiguous emotion; or the five miniatures of *Cloud Movements*, where clarinet trio outlines scenes of exquisite poise. The lilting central panel of *Songs and Dances* is framed by inward elegies, while the three sections of *Game On* draw inspiration from game theory (the concept, not the rock band) and mechanised dystopia in this laconic interplay between piano and the engagingly 'retro' sounds from a Commodore 64 keyboard.

Bookending this sequence are works exhibiting Frances-Hoad's understated yet appealing idiom at its most immediate. *The Whole Earth Dances* juxtaposes stark declamation with easeful contemplation through to the sombrely cathartic close, a gift for piano quintet, realised with conviction by the Schubert Ensemble. As does the Gildas Quartet *My Day in Hell*, music inspired by Dante with writing for string quartet whose post-Viennese sound world imparts a certain irony to these deft evocations of infernal and purgatorial 'circles'.

With sound conveying the familiar clarity and spaciousness of the Music Room at Champs Hill, and detailed if rather haphazard annotations, this should find favour with those having acquired previous releases of Frances-Hoad, while newcomers could profitably begin here.

Richard Whitehouse

Hoffmeister

'Hoffmeister's Magic Flute, Vol 1'

Duetto in G. Trios (Sonatas), Op 11 - No 2; No 3. Quartet, H5929. Flute Quintet, Op 3

Boris Bizjak fl **Lana Trotošek** vn **Piatti Quartet**
Somm © SOMMCD0620 (71' • DDD)



Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812) falls into that unfortunate group

of composers most famous for a piece of music by someone else. He achieved immortality after publishing Mozart's String Quartet in D, K499, in 1786; despite also printing a number of other works by the Salzburger, including the two piano quartets, it is the string quartet that became known for ever more by his name. Aside from such fame-by-association, it is indeed primarily as a publisher that he is nowadays best remembered: notwithstanding a substantial work list, *The New Grove* (2001) devotes only one paragraph of seven to his own

music, concluding that 'his style is generally lacking in originality and depth'.

Flautist Boris Bizjak and his partner, violinist Lana Trotošek, would beg to differ. In a recent blog for the *Gramophone* website, Bizjak writes that this music 'is well composed, flows so well and has such freshness and originality'. Certainly the Quartet that opens the disc revels in the chromatic shadings offered by its C minor tonality. All the works are in three movements, with an opening sonata-allegro followed by an aria- or serenade-like *Andante* or *Adagio* and a finale that might take the form of variations (the Quartet) or rondo (D major Trio), or evoke the thrill of the hunt (Duetto, B flat Trio). Booklet annotator Christopher Morley draws attention to the Mozartian sound world of the Trio in D and the largest work here, the Quintet, which doubles the viola rather than the violin. In *Hausmusik* such as this, the challenge falls firmly on the performers rather than the listeners, and Bizjak, Trotošek and their accomplices in the Piatti Quartet meet the music's technical demands admirably.

The cover art reproduces the famous painting of Frederick the Great giving a flute concert at Sanssouci. Vienna-based Hoffmeister, though, appears to have had no connection to Frederick or to Prussia; perhaps more appropriate might have been a likeness of Mozart's eccentric patron Count Wallsegg, who is known to have commissioned, played and passed off as his own a number of Hoffmeister's works for flute. **David Thresher**

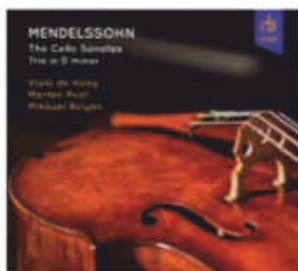
Mendelssohn

Two Cello Sonatas. Piano Trio No 1, Op 49^a

^a**Marten Root** fl **Viola de Hoog** vc

Mikayel Balyan pf

Vivat © VIVAT120 (77' • DDD)



The cello may technically be the star of the show in Mendelssohn's two cello sonatas but they're equally works that picked up where Beethoven had left off in terms of casting the piano as an equal partner. The first point to flag up about these period-instrument readings, then, is that pianist Mikayel Balyan is on an 1847 instrument by Mendelssohn's favourite maker, Érard. The second is that this Érard turns out to be a beautiful match, Balyan's multicoloured playing really showcasing the fullness and richness of tone Mendelssohn so admired, while equally

capitalising on the instrument's lighter sound in comparison to today's pianos. Listen, for instance, to the brilliance and sparkle it lends to the jubilant piano figures closing the First Sonata's opening *Allegro vivace* (and then perhaps compare with Christian Poltéra and Ronald Brautigam's own enjoyable period readings using Mendelssohn's alternative option of the more delicately voiced Pleyel).

Viola de Hoog herself is also a great listen for the wide range of moods, dynamics and articulation she brings to the cello lines – something you especially appreciate in the Second Sonata, spanning the entire Mendelssohn mood smorgasbord, from ardent, sweeping passion, checked with elegance, to lighter, Puck-like fluttering and more leisurely long-lined lyricism. The overall melodically and texturally responsive partnering is another draw. And while the ample church acoustic may feel too resonant in this repertoire for some, it gains brownie points elsewhere for its lack of audible fingers or breathing.

As for the Trio in D minor, this is the first period-instrument recording of Mendelssohn's own transcription replacing the violin with a flute, penned in 1840 at his British publisher's insistence that 'a separate flute arrangement is indispensable in this country'. Mendelssohn himself didn't want the arrangement's outer movements published, believing them too involved to translate well.

As all four made it to print regardless, however, it's all four we have here, and I'm afraid the results prove that Mendelssohn was entirely right. Even with Marten Root's graceful and spirited playing (on a delectable-toned copy of an 1830 nine-keyed German model), the flute indeed doesn't have the necessary weight for the outer movements. It's all a bit like trying to partner a butterfly with stallions, and in fact even in the *Andante* and Scherzo it doesn't feel like a natural substitution. So despite the period-instrument credentials and some fine playing, I'm afraid that for me this is a whole 28 minutes or so of the album that I'd rather skip. Trio aside, though, it's well worth giving the cello sonatas a spin.

Charlotte Gardner

Cello Sonatas – selected comparison:

Poltéra, Brautigam (1/18) (BIS) BIS2187

Mozart

Piano Quartets - No 1, K478; No 2, K493.

Rondo concertante (after K333, arr Lazić)^a

Benjamin Schmid, ^a**Zen Hu** vns **Johannes Erkes** va

Enrico Bronzi vc **Dejan Lazić** pf

Onyx © ONYX4207 (72' • DDD)



Dejan Lazić explains how Mozart was the cause of his becoming a musician – upon seeing the film *Amadeus*, no less – and how the composer became a constant in his musical life. ‘This recording’, he continues, ‘has a truly special meaning for me ... as it gave me the opportunity to reunite with my wonderful longtime friends with whom I first played in the 1990s when I was living in Salzburg and studying at the Mozarteum.’

True chamber music-making, then: a conversation between friends in the purest sense. Only a balance that fractionally favours piano over the strings mars the palpable sense of give and take between these four musicians – and that’s far from Lazić’s fault, as he demonstrates throughout these performances a remarkable fidelity to Mozart’s markings and is more than capable of fining down his sound to a genuine *pianissimo*. It’s less evident in the more lyrical E flat Trio (K493) but in the terser G minor (K478), the violin especially sounds constrained when it should soar over the texture.

Otherwise, there is much to enjoy, from the subtle agogic pauses in the E flat’s opening movement to the cheeky little touches of ornamentation added in reprises by all four players but especially by Lazić. The intensity this quartet foster in the slow movements is then released by the lighter-hearted badinage of the finales. As an envoi, Lazić offers his own arrangement for piano and quartet of the finale of the B flat Piano Sonata, K333, in the manner of Mozart’s own chamber arrangements of his earliest Viennese concertos – and most effective it is, too.

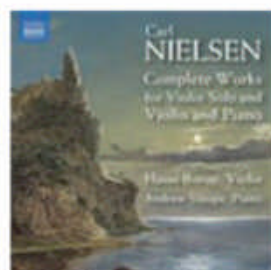
David Thresher

Nielsen

‘Complete Works for Violin Solo and Violin and Piano’

Violin Sonatas^a – No 1, Op 9; No 2, Op 35; in G. Grüss. Polka. Prelude, Theme and Variations, Op 48. Preludio e Presto, Op 52. Romances^a – in D; in G

Hasse Borup *vn*^a Andrew Staupe *pf*
Naxos © 8 573870 (88’ • DDD)



The violin was with Nielsen from the beginning. His father was an accomplished

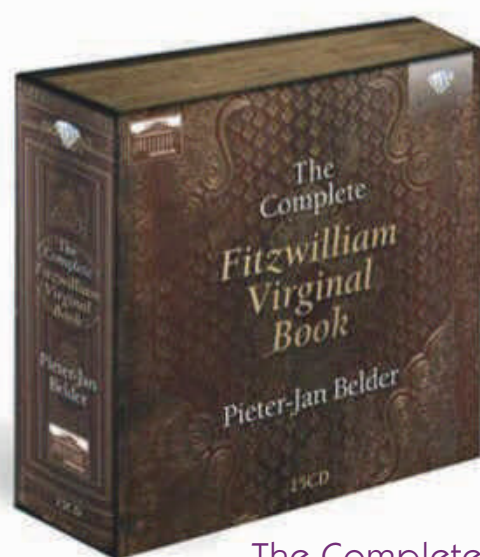
amateur, who showed him the way around the instrument from an early age; for many years his composing career was subsidised by his post as second violinist in the orchestra of the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen; and in 1913 he met the Hungarian virtuoso Emil Telmányi, who became his son-in-law and faithful devotee.

Yet with the exception of the Concerto, Nielsen’s music for the violin always prioritises substance over flashiness. The two solo works, for instance, both written for Telmányi, are ferociously demanding, but not in the way that courts applause or would make them suitable fodder for competitions or encores (contrast their more obviously violinistic close contemporaries, Ysaÿe’s six Solo Sonatas). For Telmányi, it was the First Sonata for violin and piano that first alerted him to Nielsen’s genius, and he became a staunch advocate for this and its rather more elusive successor, producing fine recordings in 1936 and 1954 (available as part of the wonderful 30-CD set of historic Nielsen recordings on Danacord, or otherwise as downloads).

To this core repertoire, Hasse Borup and Andrew Staupe add five items from Nielsen’s childhood and student years. Of these, the charming three-movement

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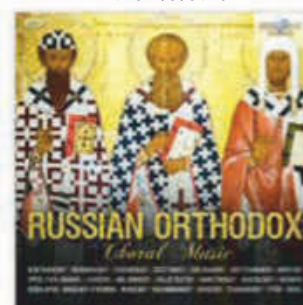
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Harriet Smith hears some digital-only festival performances



Joyous effervescence: Leonidas Kavakos leads an ardent performance of Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*

The roster listed in this quartet of live performances from the Verbier Festival is unquestionably one of A-listers. The earliest recording here is from the 2008 festival, in which Lynn Harrell was paired with a young Yuja Wang in **Rachmaninov's** Cello Sonata. Harrell sets the mood in the slow introduction with a majestic, vibrato-rich sound that seems ponderous indeed when compared with Steven Isserlis's pared-back intensity (Hyperion, 7/03). As we reach the *Allegro moderato* Wang sets up a flowing tempo in which Harrell is generally at ease, and her great gift for spinning a melodic line (for instance from 2'30") is already very much in evidence. However, in the slow third movement there's a sense of two very different personalities at work, Harrell ardently emoting, Wang more Classical. While there are many phrases and passages that are effective, they conjure none of the irresistible narrative found in Isserlis and Hough's partnership. The other two movements are more problematic, with Wang's driving (though thrilling) tempo for the Scherzo putting Harrell under pressure, at least until the big melody allows him to emote freely; in the finale Harrell too often sounds rushed, as if being pulled along by his coat tails by Wang.

From five years later comes **Tchaikovsky's** *Souvenir de Florence* and much of it is very impressive. The joyous effervescence of the opening, for instance, and the way Leonidas Kavakos moulds

the first violin's line as it emerges from the general texture, answered by the first cello of Gautier Capuçon (from 1'27") – though the cello line is more forwardly balanced for Natalia Gutman with the Borodin Quartet (EMI, 8/88 – nla). The reappearance of the rondo theme always sounds fresh and in the drive towards the double bar you sense the players giving their all. The famous duet in the second movement was supposedly dreamt up by Tchaikovsky during his stay in Florence, and Kavakos and Capuçon give it great ardency, with the most limpid of accompaniments. But turn to Heifetz and Piatigorsky (RCA) and it becomes an even more natural conversation, which is irresistible. Though the playing is consistently impressive in the third movement, I found Bashmet's rendering of the first viola line for the Borodin more authentically folkish than Antoine Tamestit's at Verbier and at the *L'istesso tempo* (from 2'45") I wanted more rusticity and abandon, though there's no doubting the polish of this new account. That quality is equally evident in the finale, and the ending is undeniably thrilling.

The **Franck** Piano Quintet dates from the 2014 festival and it's good to see Marc-André Hamelin very much taking centre stage with a string line-up led by Joshua Bell. Here I did wonder about the recorded balance at times, for Isserlis sounds slightly underpowered. Comparison with the recording made

by Hamelin and the Takács Quartet the following year (Hyperion, 6/16) is interesting, an on-the-whole subtler account – perhaps purely because of the difference between an established string quartet and a group of big personalities. That's evident from the opening phrases of Bell, which are more overtly ardent than those of Edward Dusinberre. But this is a work that can take a range of approaches and passages such as the *Allegro* in the first movement (from 2'59") are thrilling in this live reading, the malevolently churning piano leading the way, answered by strings at first forthright and then more unsettled. The central *Lento* movement has a caressing quality, the major/minor shifts giving it an uncertainty that is fully exploited by Bell et al. I like, too, their flowing speed here. The finale bursts in with a quiet fury, the tremolo strings setting up a thrilling sense of propulsion that more than makes up for the very occasional subsequent moment of sour tuning. By comparison the Takács account is a tad saner right down to the blazing closing octaves.

Shostakovich's teenage single-movement First Trio brings together Janine Jansen with Mischa Maisky and young French pianist Lucas Debargue, and is the most recent offering here, dating from 2017. I have to confess I have major problems with Maisky's vibrato-rich sound and tendency to hog the limelight, and I've never really understood why Jansen, a violinist of such exquisite delicacy, should work with him so regularly. This is, however, less offensive to the ear than his reading with daughter Lily at the Lugano Festival (EMI/Warner, 6/09). That said, there's plenty of Romantic ardour on display in this reading, which fits the mood of the music, and Debargue is a lively colleague; but for me this is the least convincing performance here. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Rachmaninov Cello Sonata
Harrell, Wang

DG ⓘ ➔ 483 9311

Tchaikovsky *Souvenir de Florence*
Kavakos, R Capuçon et al

DG ⓘ ➔ 483 9310

Franck Piano Quintet
Hamelin, Bell et al

DG ⓘ ➔ 483 9295

Shostakovich Piano Trio No 1
Jansen, Maisky, Debargue

DG ⓘ ➔ 483 9292

G major Sonata has certainly been recorded before, as has the Polka, which Nielsen remembered playing as a child in his father's village band, and which he notated in his memoirs. The two Romances and the four-bar *Greeting* (found in a friend's autograph book) aren't claimed as first recordings but I don't recall hearing them before. All these works were published in 2009 in the 'Juvenilia et Addenda' volume of *The Carl Nielsen Edition*.

Borup and Staue are robust, reliable advocates and their complete coverage of the repertoire makes this CD obviously collectable. If it is hard to couch the recommendation any more enthusiastically, that is mainly because of the rather pinched, unvaried quality of the violin tone. I wondered momentarily whether the minimal vibrato might be some kind of attempt to recapture performance practice of the time. But it is certainly not a characteristic of Telmányi's playing. No such reservations about the piano-playing, although the less than glowing acoustic does it no favours. **David Fanning**

'Hope@Home'

Andres Hijo de la luna Arlen Over the rainbow
Brahms Wie rafft ich mich auf in der Nacht,
Op 32 No 1 **Di Gioia** Berlin-Tel Aviv **Falla**
Asturiana **Fauré** Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1
Gershwin Porgy and Bess – Summertime
Hadjidakis Never on Sunday – Theme **Heymann**
Ein blonder Traum – Irgendwo auf der Welt
Kosma Les feuilles mortes **Louiguy** La vie en
rose **Mancini** Moon River **Otis** This Bitter Earth
Rachmaninov Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 **M Richter**
On the Nature of Daylight **Rota** Godfather Waltz
Satie Gnossienne No 1 **Schubert** An die Musik,
D547 **Ward** America the Beautiful **Weber**
Larghetto **Weill** Lost in the stars. Youkali
Daniel Hope *vn* **Christoph Israel** *pf* and friends
DG © 483 9482GH (78' • DDD)

Recorded live



Berlin, as James Jolly reported in his streaming feature (8/20), was the first major city to break the musical silence imposed by lockdown. From March 12, Igor Levit, returning from the grocery store, impulsively tweeted that he was going to stream a concert that evening from his apartment, a series that ran each night for 52 episodes. A fortnight later another Berlin resident, violinist Daniel Hope, began a similar enterprise.

'Enterprise' seems the right word. Whereas Levit's *Hauskonzert* series was

self-produced, streamed via his phone on Twitter, Hope was concerned about sound quality. He teamed up with Franco-German television company Arte – which broadcasts some incredible content, including the entire Salzburg Festival this year – and they turned his living room into a performance studio for a series of short recitals entitled *Hope@Home*. Working alongside pianist and arranger Christoph Israel as well as a number of guests, Hope played a wide range of repertoire, a representative sprinkling of which features on this DG album taken directly from those broadcasts.

'Sometimes life doesn't allow for second takes', Hope writes, explaining that there was no patching or editing. It sounds pretty polished and professional, though, and the selection makes for an entertaining salon soirée. Hope's silky violin tone suits these little gems, such as the glossy 'La vie en rose' or the first of Satie's *Gnossiennes*. We're mostly at the light-music end of the spectrum; I particularly enjoyed Israel's arrangement of Weill's 'Youkali' and a swooning rendition of 'Moon River'.

Perhaps some high-profile salon guests were prevented from appearing on the album by their record contracts, but Matthias Goerne and Tamara Stefanovich perform Brahms and vocalists Max Raabe and Joy Denalane each join Hope, the former in a number from the 1932 film *Ein blonder Traum*. A number of actors appeared in Hope's series but the only one to make it to disc is German actress Iris Berben, narrating Kipling's 'If' over Manuel de Falla's *Asturiana*, a poignant juxtaposition.

A pleasurable album, which should make a fine memento to those who followed the series as it unfolded online. **Mark Pullinger**

'London circa 1720'

'Corelli's Legacy'

Babell Concerto, Op 3 No 2 **Corelli/Schickhardt**
Sonata, Op 6 No 4 (after Concerti grossi, Op 6
Nos 1 & 2) **Geminiani** Sonata, Op 1 No 4 **Handel**
Admeto – Spera si mio caro bene. Concerto a
quattro (attrib Telemann). Viola da gamba
Sonata, HWV364b **Haym** Thus with thirst my
souls expiring (arr Chaboud) **Schickhardt**
Concerto, Op 19 No 2

La Rêveuse / Benjamin Perrot *theorbo*

Florence Bolton *viols*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5322 (61' • DDD)



La Rêveuse bring us a disc of splendid music-making. If the finely phrased strings

bursting with vivacity in the opening movement of William Babell's Concerto in D somehow don't hook you, then the second movement will stop you in your tracks. On his 'sixth flute', a small descant recorder in D, Sébastien Marq produces a note that makes one's lung capacity feel entirely inadequate. Lasting a staggering 21 seconds – and bear in mind that Corelli's violinists had to produce a *forte* double-stopped bow stroke of 10 seconds to deserve a place in his orchestra – Marq's single note charts a journey from penetrating whistle to morning birdsong, eventually unfolding into aria. In a world of fake news, it is a breath of fresh air: the undoctored frailty, the teeniest wavering in pitch make the music more real, more alive with sincerity. It garners a type of listening that relishes the beauty of blemish. And when we embrace these shifting standards, magical things happen: ornamentation is carried to our ears on the wind, luscious string ritornellos don't merely punctuate the solo recorder's song but rather wash the scene in bronzed legato. The final *Allegro* is all you could want (and expect) from a recorder concerto: delicious romp and combative virtuosity in spades.

The theme of the disc makes for a lovely coherence between works (though I'm not sure that the arrangement of the aria 'Spera si mio caro bene' from Handel's opera *Admeto* quite fits). There is enough variety, both timbral and affectual, to keep one in sonic rapture, and the unfamiliar composers and historical arrangers Johann Christian Schickhardt, Nicola Francesco Haym and Pietro Chauboud are presented in an excellent light. Yet it is the individual and plentiful moments of beauty that make this album so enthralling. Stéphan Dudermel's sound in the Violin Sonata in D by Geminiani is quite simply stunning. His *Adagio* is loving, bright, soft-skinned and soul-searching. Or theorbist Benjamin Perrot's gorgeous plucking in 'Thus with thirst my souls expiring', arranged by Chauboud, which intermingles with Florence Bolton's dense – sometimes pungently so – gamba sound. It's heady stuff; a fabulous final track to an all-round superb album.

Mark Seow



Vittorio Gui

The founder of a handful of Italian orchestras, this conductor gave equal importance to his operatic and symphonic work and was himself a respected composer, says Tully Potter

Among the great Italian maestros, Vittorio Gui was the one whose music-making had the most singular flavour. He could thunder with the best, but he understood that the masks of tragedy and comedy are the same size, twin reflections of the human condition. He often favoured slow tempos, but his rhythm was so true, his sense of humour so subtle, that the result was never dour or turgid. His Mozart was gracious, his Rossini effervescent – witness his Glyndebourne *La Cenerentola*.

In opera, where he ranged from Purcell and Handel to Dallapiccola, he worked with singers from Mattia Battistini and Giuseppe Borgatti to Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi. As ‘the noblest Roman of them all’ he did his Rome Opera and La Scala stints but based much of his career in Florence, living in a 15th-century villa near Fiesole. Later he was the sage of Glyndebourne and conducted at the Bregenz Festival in Austria – such havens suited him better than the US, where he seems never to have worked.

Gui followed Toscanini in giving equal importance to symphonic and operatic work. In his thirties and forties, he started a Milan orchestra to allow La Scala players the chance to play symphonic works; reinvigorated opera in Turin, initiating the Rossini revival; and gave Florence its first permanent orchestra, which soon led to his founding of the Maggio Musicale festival there.

A respected composer of wide sympathies and deep culture, he was Italy’s foremost Brahmsian and befriended such colleagues as Puccini, Pizzetti, Strauss, Elgar and Stravinsky. Among his many recordings for Italian radio (RAI) were 35 Bach cantatas – some of which he edited for publication – and seven Handel oratorios.

No Fascist, Gui negotiated his way through the inter-war years without having to dirty his hands too much – apparently Mussolini was impressed by his Great War service record and array of medals. He did conduct in Vienna and Berlin during the Second World War but emerged relatively unscathed.

Apart from Brahms’s Symphonies Nos 2 and 3 on Cetra/Parlophone 78s, his concert repertoire was sparingly recorded. HMV issued fine LP accounts of Haydn Nos 60 and 95 and Mozart Nos 38 and 39 with the RPO (as the Glyndebourne Festival Orchestra), and studio performances with his Florence orchestra were released on early stereo tapes (the Maggio Musicale offers a selection on CD). Alert scanners of catalogues and YouTube can find Brahms’s Fourth, Mozart’s B flat Piano Concerto with Pietro Scarpini, Bach’s D minor, BWV1052, with Maria Tipo, Mozart’s *Sinfonia concertante* with

Riccardo Brengola and Dino Asciolla, and Brahms No 4 and Mozart No 40 recorded at Gui’s last concert, just two weeks before his death.

Opera buffs are better served, starting with the 1937 *Norma* with Gina Cigna, Ebe Stignani and Tancredi Pasero. Live treasures include the pre-war 1939 Covent Garden *Il trovatore* with Cigna and Jussi Björling and *La traviata* with Maria Caniglia and Beniamino Gigli, in so-so sound; Gui’s sole post-war Covent Garden assignment, Callas’s best *Norma*; *Nabucco* and *Parsifal* with Callas; a riveting *Macbeth* with Giuseppe Taddei and Leyla Gencer; *L’amico Fritz* with Rosanna Carteri and Cesare Valletti; and from Glyndebourne, a luminous *Pelléas et Mélisande* with Denise Duval, *Falstaff* with Geraint Evans and *I puritani* with Joan Sutherland. Gui’s 1951 *Aida*, an RAI performance issued

Gui’s 1951 Aida is the most visceral on record, with thrilling singing by Mancini, Simionato, Filippeschi, Panerai and Neri

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1885 – Born Rome, September 14, into musical family

Piano lessons from mother, a Giovanni Sgambati pupil. In 1906 graduates with master’s degree in humanities; first publication – opera *David*. Composition studies with Giacomo Setaccioli and Stanislao Falchi, at Santa Cecilia academy, Rome.

• 1907 – Accidental start to conducting career

Standing in at short notice, makes unexpectedly successful conducting debut (*La Gioconda*) at Teatro Adriano, Rome; graduates from Santa Cecilia academy. 1908: conducts premiere of Pizzetti’s music to *La nave*, Rome. 1911: Turin and Naples debuts; meets Debussy.

• 1923 – Conducts in Milan and Rome

Opens La Scala season with *Salome* and Riccitelli’s *I compagni*; Teatro Costanzi, Rome, debut with *Aida*. 1924: founds Ente Concerti Orchestrali, Milan. 1925: founds orchestra of Teatro di Torino; revives *L’italiana in Algeri* with Conchita Supervia; *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Strauss present. 1927: premieres his fairy opera *La fata malerba*.

• 1928 – Establishes Florentine connections

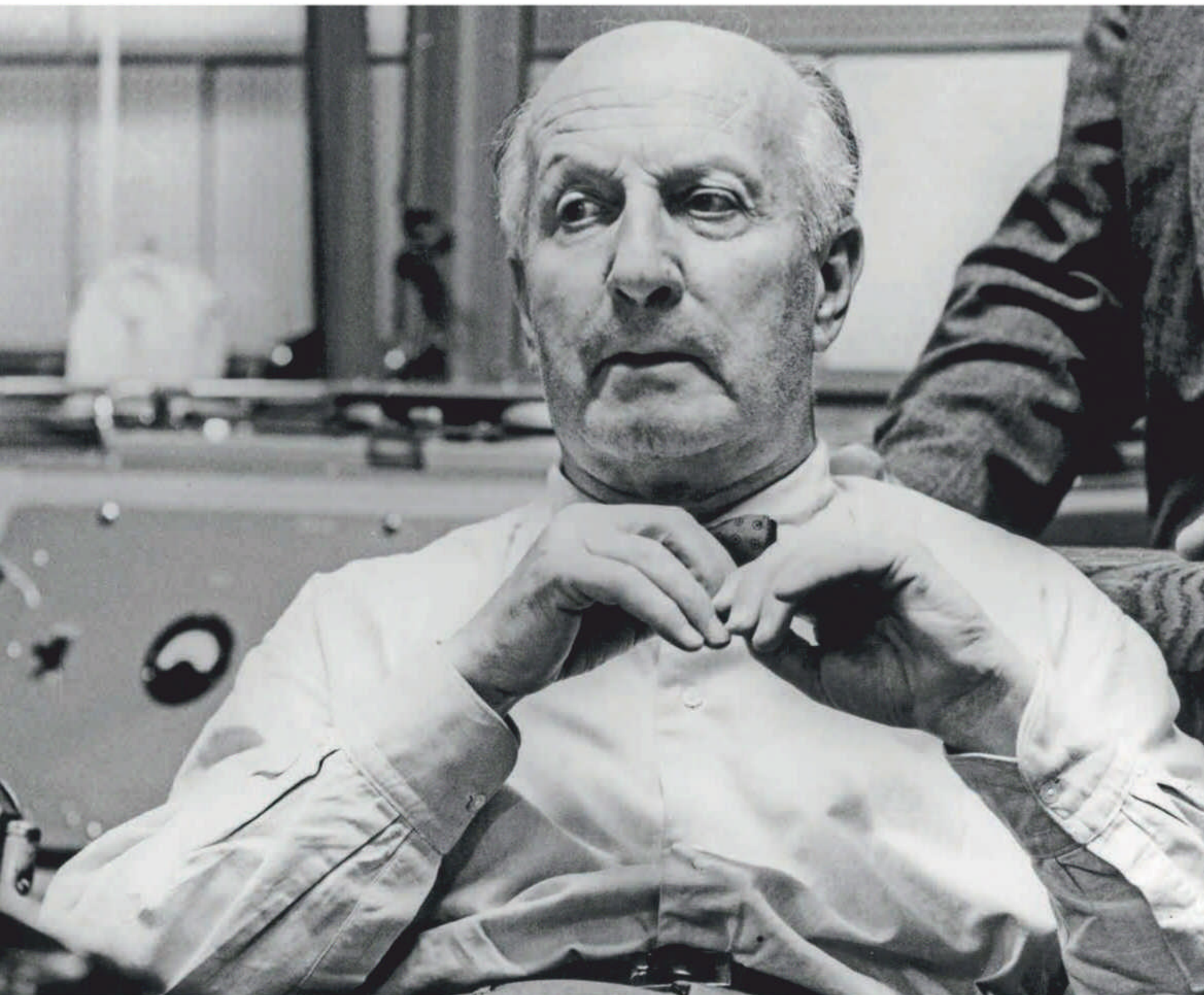
Founds Orchestra Stabile, Florence; directs entire first orchestral season; nine operas conducted by others. 1933: opera season becomes Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, which he directs until 1936.

• 1952 – Glyndebourne Gui

Becomes principal conductor of Glyndebourne Festival Opera, having first worked with company at 1948 Edinburgh Festival. 1960–65: Artistic Counsellor and Head of Music; final new productions, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Il matrimonio segreto*.

• 1975 – Dies, aged 90

Last concert, Teatro Comunale, Florence, October 5, 1975. Dies at home near Fiesole, October 16.



officially by Cetra, is the most visceral on record, with thrilling singing by Caterina Mancini, Giulietta Simionato, Mario Filippeschi, Rolando Panerai and Giulio Neri.

Although Gui could be quite purist, he was of a generation who snipped bits out of even the greatest operas and oratorios, in the interests of drama. His 1943 Cetra set of Haydn's *Le stagioni* is hacked to ribbons: what remains is of such quality that one regrets the excisions all the more. His live 1949 *Un ballo in maschera* lacks Riccardo's Act 3 aria of renunciation. His 1955 HMV set of Boito's *Mefistofele* with Boris Christoff has three major cuts including all of Act 4: so no Helen of Troy.

Such butchery could be down to outside interference: HMV forced him to cut 20 minutes out of one of his greatest recordings, the 1956 Glyndebourne set of Rossini's *Le comte Ory*, after the sessions. Had EMI kept the scissored tape sections, they could have been restored for the CD edition. However, help is at hand from Gui's

1959 live RAI performance, with an identical female cast and top-notch male singers, which preserves his edition complete; so we can hear Raffaele Ariè sing the tutor's aria, for instance.

To represent Gui at his best, it has to be one of two Great Recordings of the Century from Glyndebourne, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, both headed by the inimitable Sesto Bruscantini as Figaro. The scales tip towards the Mozart, because the GROC package includes Symphonies Nos 38 and 39. It is not perfect. It is better than that – a living, breathing, human drama. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Mozart *Le nozze di Figaro*. Symphonies – No 38 'Prague' & No 39 Sesto Bruscantini bass et al; Glyndebourne Fest Chor & Orch / Gui Warner Classics (symphonies: 3/54, 10/54; opera: 1/56)

Teamwork is the keynote in the opera: the ensembles interlock naturally under Gui's serene but observant direction. Even late import Graziella Sciutti works well with Sena Jurinac, Risè Stevens, Monica Sinclair, Sesto Bruscantini, Franco Calabrese, Ian Wallace and Hugues Cuénod's sharp Don Basilio. The orchestra plays superbly.

Instrumental



Jeremy Nicholas hears Boris Bloch play Tchaikovsky's Seasons:

'His understanding of Tchaikovsky's world translates into performances that touchingly capture its melancholy' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 60](#)



Jed Distler watches a fascinating film about Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli:

'Michelangeli's piano technician recalls how the pianist's hypersensitive touch led to the discovery of minuscule imperfections' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 63](#)

JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988

Pavel Kolesnikov *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68338 (79' • DDD)



In Lindsay Kemp's fascinating feature on the *Goldbergs* in the October issue,

one of the subjects he addresses is how long different pianists wait until committing them to disc. For many artists it's a case of decades; but Pavel Kolesnikov was prompted to learn the work after choreographer and dancer Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker asked him to collaborate with her on a new piece. Barely a year later, in December 2019, he set down this recording. A bold decision, and one in which his previous foray into Louis Couperin (also recorded on a Yamaha) and questions of Baroque style has obviously proved useful.

He paces the Aria well and the following variations are full of Kolesnikov's characteristic refinement and imaginative colour palette. I like the élan of Var 1 and the trumpets-and-drums effect in Var 4, while the Giga that is Var 7 has a limpid airiness to it. The fughetta subject of Var 10 is beautifully phrased and given real clarity, while he imbues Var 21, taken quite slowly, with an organ-like timbre, beautifully sustaining the intertwining lines.

Kolesnikov talks about the *Goldbergs* being like 'climbing an infinite stairway, one step at a time', and that manifests itself in the way he emphasises the contrasts between each variation, using all the piano has to offer in the process. But that can have a downside and sometimes his ornamentation (which he tends to apply on repeats) strikes me as a touch prissy – sample Vars 1, 8 and 17 to hear what I mean. And though his fascination with bringing out unexpected lines and elements can be delightful (in Var 19, for instance), at other times it interferes with the sense of narrative – in Var 3, for example, or Var 12,

which he takes at a leisurely tempo: here Perahia and Rana are more flowing and sound more instinctive. The so-called 'Black Pearl' (Var 25) is always a telling point in the *Goldbergs* and Kolesnikov takes the dynamics right down, creating a real sense of intimacy and sustaining the musical argument unerringly. I found myself impressed rather than moved by the result – Levit is more emotionally compelling here, at a spacious tempo. Kolesnikov's is, though, far preferable to Lang Lang's laboured reading, which, unlike Jed Distler, I found anything but heavenly.

The variations that follow also throw up issues, Var 26 sounding a tad timid compared to Rana (delicate but with billowing phrasing), while the canon in Var 27 sounds overly fragile in Kolesnikov's hands, especially when compared to the rude good health of Levit. In the Quodlibet (Var 30) Rana conveys its bucolic humour rather better than Kolesnikov, in whose hands the theme emerges out of a wash of sound, sounding almost strident as it gains in confidence. The reprise of the Aria is unquestionably sensitive and pianistically finessed but again I hankered after something simpler – Perahia is just right here. So a mixed result: I'll be intrigued to hear how Kolesnikov's interpretation changes over time. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Perahia (12/00) (SONY) SK89243

Levit (11/15) (SONY) 88875 06096-2

Rana (4/17) (WARN) 9029 58801-8

Lang (10/20) (DG) 481 8971GH2 or 481 9701

Bartók • Brahms • Liszt

Bartók Rhapsody, Op 1 Sz26 Brahms Piano

Sonata No 2, Op 2. Rhapsody, Op 79 No 1

Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody, S244 No 11

Alexandre Kantorow *pf*

BIS © BIS2380 (66' • DDD/DSD)



By June 2019 when, at the age of 22, Alexandre Kantorow became the first

French pianist to win the Tchaikovsky Competition, he already had four recordings to his credit: French violin and piano sonatas with his father, Jean-Jacques (NoMad Music, 2014); the two canonic Liszt concertos and *Malédiction* (BIS, A/15); a Russian recital (7/17); and the last three Saint-Saëns concertos (6/19). Since his Moscow victory, he has been the piano soloist in a new recording of music by José Serebrier (4/20) and, most recently, has a solo release of his own, including rhapsodies by Brahms, Bartók, and Liszt.

Kantorow is obviously an outstanding pianist and musician with an agile technique that allows him perfect clarity in the most complex textures, abundant sensitivity and refinement, and maturity well beyond his years. For the final round with orchestra in Moscow last year he played the Tchaikovsky G major and Brahms B flat Concertos, a remarkable feat given the enormous demands of both those works. In interviews he's called Brahms his 'favourite', and that affinity is apparent here.

A passionate reading of the first of the two Op 79 Rhapsodies serves as the overture to Brahms's sprawling F sharp minor Sonata, a symphony locked within a piano sonata if there ever were one. Kantorow's approach to the sonata is both thoughtful and persuasive, with ample stores of sympathy for its 19-year-old composer. He brings a welcome sense of coherence to the *Andante con espressione* which, in other hands, can sound like alternating whispers and shouts. His performance of the rhapsodic finale, perhaps part of the rationale for the sonata's inclusion in this programme of rhapsodies, is certainly among the most convincing.

Bartók was roughly the age Kantorow is now when he composed his Op 1. With his piano transcription of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* already behind him, Bartók had yet to undertake the folkloristic field research with Kodály that would inform his mature style. Kantorow hews a confident path through this dense thicket of post-Liszt-Mosonyi-Erkel rhetoric with its heavy Straussian canopy, imbuing it with a credible



Sensitivity and refinement: Alexandre Kantorow follows his success at the Tchaikovsky Competition with an album of Bartók, Brahms and Liszt

sense of characteristic *parlando* rubato. That he does so without overplaying is cause for even greater wonder. Arrival finally at the 11th Liszt Rhapsody feels like the achievement of an oasis of purest classicism and succinct expression, and provides a showcase for Kantorow's ability to maintain clarity and poise at breakneck speed.

Rarely has the growth of a young artist been so amply documented in recordings as has Kantorow's. I'll be among those eagerly anticipating its continued flowering.

Patrick Rucker

Beethoven

'Beethoven 32, Vol 1'

Piano Sonatas Nos 1-3, Op 2

Boris Giltburg *pf*

Naxos © ➔ 9 70307 (71' • DDD)

Beethoven

'Beethoven 32, Vol 2'

Piano Sonatas - No 4, Op 7; Nos 5-7, Op 10

Boris Giltburg *pf*

Naxos © ➔ 9 70308 (84' • DDD)

Beethoven

'Beethoven 32, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas - No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13;

Nos 9 & 10, Op 14; No 11, Op 22

Boris Giltburg *pf*

Naxos © ➔ 9 70309 (76' • DDD)



My introduction to Boris Giltburg was in November 2014, when he appeared with the Baltimore Symphony under Marin Alsop playing Rachmaninov's First Concerto. The previous June, Alsop had conducted the concerto finals for the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, where Giltburg won first prize. The qualities in his playing that impressed on that chilly autumn afternoon – beautiful singing line, variety of touch and wide dynamic palette, instant and easy communication with the audience and a no-nonsense stage manner – have stood him in good stead since. In addition to a fine series of recordings, primarily of the Russians but ranging to Schumann, Liszt, Dvořák, Grieg and, of course, Beethoven, he has also emerged as an inveterate blogger. Giltburg has written that, during 2020, he set out to learn and

film, in collaboration with Stewart French, all 32 Beethoven sonatas, only nine of which he had played at that point. The separately released Naxos recordings reviewed here, including the canonic sonatas up to 1800, represent the beginning of the audio element of that overall project.

The series gets off to an auspicious start with the F minor and A major Sonatas of Op 2. In both, Giltburg admirably conveys the young Beethoven building on the foundations of his older contemporaries, alive to their latest innovations while posing novelties of his own, if not yet audaciously, certainly unmistakably. Textures are consistently transparent and the musical discourse unfolds unambiguously, nowhere more powerfully than in the furious *Prestissimo* finale of the F minor Sonata. Giltburg's passionate reading sidesteps bluster while achieving a credible equivalent on the modern instrument of the quieter dynamics and more rapid decay of early 19th-century Viennese pianos. Only the immense C major Sonata, Op 2 No 3, seems to ask more questions than it answers. Despite its buoyant energy, classical proportions and judicious pedalling, the sonata's impact is diminished by a certain sameness of articulation, with attack and release

strategies seeming calculated and predictable. One is left with the impression of a work held at arm's length rather than fully, comfortably inhabited with freedom and spontaneity.

In keeping with the character of both the Op 14 Sonatas, Giltburg's approach is prevailingly lyrical. One cannot help observing, however, that the opening *Allegros* of each may not be exactly equivalent in spirit. The calm of the E major Sonata when applied to the rather more ebullient G major Sonata sacrifices a good deal of the latter's jocularly.

For me, the two standouts of the series thus far are Opp 13 and 22. I can think of no other performance of the *Pathétique* that imbues the *Grave* introduction with a greater sense of melancholy desolation. For once it is a true *Sonata pathétique* rather than a *Sonata furieux*, and taken as a whole it is thoroughly compelling. The *Adagio* demonstrates Giltburg's ability to rise to levels of genuine eloquence through a disarming simplicity of utterance. The Rondo is lean, insistent, more detached than legato and prone to plead its case rather than setting out a fait accompli.

The bright, ingratiating Op 22 is also brimful of character, its narrative unfolding with a charming urgency. Giltburg captures the luxurious singing beauty of the *Adagio* while giving full play to its ominous undercurrents of ambivalence. Characteristic Beethoven idiosyncrasies are seamlessly woven into a less than courtly minuet and the *Allegretto* Rondo, despite disruptive excursions, exudes a Schubertian grace and ease. As with the *Pathétique*, the B flat Sonata scores all its points with earnestness, discretion and a strong point of view that departs from the norm. In a sense, it typifies what one might hope for in a traversal of familiar repertory by an outstanding young artist: fresh perspective on terrain one thought one knew, shedding new light in view of current realities, sincerely expressed with commitment and originality.

Patrick Rucker

Crumb

Metamorphoses – Book 1

Marcantonio Barone *pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9535 (37' • DDD)



George Crumb's 1972/73 *Makrokosmos* Books 1 and 2 made innovative use of amplification and extended piano techniques both inside and outside of

the instrument, yet never as ends in themselves, and with the utmost specificity of means and expression. The same can be said of Crumb's *Metamorphoses* Book 1, written between 2015 and 2017 to showcase Margaret Leng Tan's extended piano technique mastery, along with her toy piano virtuosity and penchant for vocal theatrics.

The 10 movements draw inspiration from favourite paintings. 'Perilous Night', for example, takes its cue from Jasper Johns's painting of the same name, and features fast and subtly shifting aggregates of single notes punctuated by strumming and scraping gestures on the piano soundboard's lower strings. In 'The Persistence of Memory', Crumb's 'shadowy, dreamy' directive musically mirrors Salvador Dalí's melting wristwatches set in a desolate landscape. The score contains common pitches that are alternately plucked and hammered, along with fleeting quotes from Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op 110 and 'Amazing Grace'. Evocations of a violin's open strings together with tremolos that flicker like fireflies characterise Marc Chagall's *The Fiddler*. On the other hand, I doubt that Vincent Van Gogh would have imagined the sound world of 'Crows over the Wheatfield' consisting of percussive gestures, long resonances and vocal interjections.

It takes a special kind of pianist to coordinate, integrate and internalise the kind of performance multitasking that Crumb habitually demands. As such, the impressive fluidity and sense of atmosphere distinguishing Margaret Leng Tan's live premiere performance (Mode Records) cannot be denied. Under studio conditions, however, Marcantonio Barone enjoys built-in advantages. In 'Contes barbares' (after Paul Klee), Barone is able to go back and forth between rapid muted gestures and text declamation with greater animation and force. Drier ambience and closer microphone placement impart a more incisive and biting edge to the asymmetrical, neo-Bartókian passages, although Tan's cumulative sweep packs quite a wallop. While Barone captures the Nocturne's painstakingly calibrated dynamic gradations, somehow Tan's long lines take on more of a floating *cantabile* quality.

Since Tan and Barone both worked closely with the composer and earned his proverbial seal of approval, I hesitate recommending one recording over the other, for these musicians complement one another. Crumb's 1962 *Five Piano*

Pieces fill out the Mode disc, while Bridge offers the *Metamorphoses* alone, resulting in a CD with a relatively short playing time. Yet I won't complain, given the potent combination of Crumb's undiminished genius and Barone's accomplished artistry.

Jed Distler

Comparative version:

Tan (MODE) MOD-CD303

Haydn

'Eight Early Sonatas'

Keyboard Sonatas, HobXVI – No 6; No 12; No 13; No 19; No 20; No 44; No 46; No 47

Tuija Hakkila *fp*

Online © (two discs for the price of one)

ODE1360-2D (135' • DDD)



The music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and his treatise on keyboard-playing

were essential to Haydn's musical education, and one hears the influence of the older composer throughout these early keyboard sonatas. Ideas skitter across the page, there are bracing contrasts of texture and mood, and larger structures feel both improvisatory and inevitable at the same time. Using two fortepianos to accentuate contrast and variety of sonority, Tuija Hakkila makes a lively, appealing romp of these diverse and engaging works.

Dating Haydn's keyboard works is a complicated business but the eight sonatas gathered here likely all date from before the mid-1770s, when the composer was in his early forties. The musical range runs from divertimento-like movements, simple and appealing, to the longer *Sturm und Drang* sonatas of the 1770s, including the magnificent C minor Sonata (No 20), which receives, unfortunately, a slightly more scattered and unfocused reading than the other works on this two-disc set. For the E major Sonata (No 13), Hakkila uses a period instrument by an unknown maker and it is a revelation. The sound ranges from dry, timpani-like thumpiness to a glassy, almost metallic sheen in the upper register. This range serves the music well, adding a welcome bit of acoustic carnival.

Hakkila is a gifted player, alert to the nuance and quicksilver changes of Haydn's mercurial style. Nothing is forced but no eccentricity is left behind, either. Her playing is technically accomplished and interpretatively alert, and one hears the steady progress of Haydn's inventiveness and spirit of adventure throughout the set.

Philip Kennicott

Holloway · Seabourne

'British Works for Horn'

Holloway Lament^a. Two Partitas

Seabourne The Black Pegasus^b.

Encounters^c. Julie Dances. Mille fiori^a

Ondřej Vrabec *hn* with ^{ac}**Hana Sapáková**,

^a**Daniela Roubíčková**, ^a**Michaela Vincencová** *hns*

^b**Mio Sakamoto** *pf*

Sheva Contemporary © SH241

(61' • DDD)



Peter Seabourne (*b*1960) studied with Robin Holloway at Cambridge

University in the early 1980s, and an entire disc of music for solo horn – albeit featuring two horn quartets – might seem a curious way to pair them on disc. However, when the works are performed as dazzlingly as they are here, the result is simply a joy. Ondřej Vrabec's virtuosity is certainly put to the test here but he does not put a finger – or tongue! – wrong.

Seabourne's brief, vibrant fanfare *Mille fiori* (2011) provides a sonically spectacular opening. Its quartet of horn players, led by Vrabec, are heard to deeper effect musically in Holloway's moving *Lament*, a fine example of an occasional piece (for two horns, 2013) rethought as a more substantial composition (2019). *Encounters* for two horns (2019), in which he partners Hana Sapáková, is a suite of five engaging miniatures, each taking its cue from a fragment of music by Holloway; the Scherzo is a particular delight. *The Black Pegasus* (2018), where Mio Sakamoto provides the impeccable accompaniment, is a single, dramatic movement, inspired by a painting by Odilon Redon.

Most impressive, though, are the unaccompanied works, in which Vrabec's playing shines brightest. The five movements in each of Holloway's two Partitas of 1985 follow Bachian forms (Courante, Gavotte, Musette, Loure, Gigue), but there is nothing Baroque or pastiche in the resulting music. Each was tailored to the playing styles of their dedicatees: Barry Tuckwell in No 1, John Kerrigan in the sequel. By contrast, Seabourne's amusing *Julie Dances* (2019) derives from photographs of Vrabec's young daughter and are based on English nursery rhymes. Sheva's sound is marvellous; a model of (crystal) clarity.

Guy Rickards

Schubert

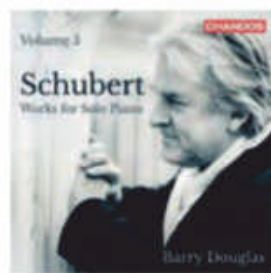
'Works for Solo Piano, Vol 5'

Piano Sonatas – No 14, D784; No 17, D850.

Schwanengesang, D957 (arr Liszt) – No 1, Liebesbotschaft, S560 No 10; No 4, Ständchen, S560 No 7

Barry Douglas *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20157 (72' • DDD)



Reviewers often resort to the cliché 'granitic' when describing an interpretation that

pursues a direct, unswerving course and conveys an austere, unvarnished demeanour. That's exactly what Barry Douglas delivers in the first movement of Schubert's A minor Sonata, D784. He makes expressive points not through tempo modification but by varying his touch and timbre. As a result, the unison lines take on an appropriately ambivalent character that alternates between plain-spoken and ghostly. Similar observations reflect the economy of means with which Douglas sings out the oddly brief (by Schubertian standards!) slow movement. Douglas's measured tempo for the *Allegro vivace* allows the spiralling imitative lines to unfold and untangle of their own volition, in marked contrast to Lucas Debargue's rapid-fire fingers (Sony, 2/18).

However, Douglas's unyielding concentration works to less advantage in the opening *Allegro* of the D major Sonata (D850), where I miss the differentiation in mood, the suppleness and the forward thrust of Richard Goode's recording (Nonesuch). If Douglas's second-movement *Con moto* doesn't quite match Clifford Curzon's sustaining power (Decca, 11/64), one must credit his strong legato finger technique. The pianist dusts off the Scherzo's lighter, higher-register writing with ease, yet negotiates the loud dotted chords with heavy hands and a tad too much pedal. His measured tread through the Rondo reveals a rarely exposed dark undercurrent to the music's disarming, nursery rhyme-like demeanour. Douglas's Schubert/Liszt 'Liebesbotschaft' projects a lyrical warmth and gravitas that differs from Volodos's lithic, springier account (Sony, 10/97). But Douglas's slow tempo in 'Ständchen' borders on static: a far cry from the aged Horowitz's voluptuous mobility (DG). The engineer's wide dynamic compass compensates for a lack of luminosity and robustness. Schubert scholar Brian Newbould's perceptive booklet notes deserve special mention.

Jed Distler

Tchaikovsky

'Piano Works, Vol 9'

The Seasons, Op 37*bis*. Dumka, Op 59. Momento lirico (Impromptu), Op *posth*. Romance, Op 5.

Six Morceaux, Op 51 – No 4, Natha-valse; No 6, Valse sentimentale. 18 Morceaux, Op 72 – No 8, Dialogue; No 15, Un poco di Chopin. Wiegenlied, Op 16 No 1 (transcr Pabst)

Boris Bloch *pf*

Ars Produktion © ARS38 509 (80' • DDD/DSD)



Here is a curious curate's egg. The recording is based on the concert Boris

Bloch gave on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the death of Tchaikovsky on November 6, 2018, in the New Hall of the Folkwang University of Arts (Essen, Germany). I had been forewarned by our reviews editor that 'there are tuning issues with the piano'. I'll say. The first six and last two months of *The Seasons* are recordings from that live concert. So are the Romance, Op 5, 'Natha-valse' and Dumka. All suffer, particularly from the octave above middle C. The remaining items on the disc are studio recordings. Strangely, while this second instrument might have fewer tuning issues, it boasts a brittle, lemony tone with hammers that surely needed a technician's gentle prodding. *Fortissimos* are not pleasant.

Yet there is something about Boris Bloch's playing of these 20 short works that commands attention. His deep love of the composer is revealed in his booklet essay and in every note he plays: 'When I listen to Tchaikovsky, the beauty, sincerity and simplicity of his melodies touch my soul like no other music. One loves them simply as one would love the dearest person in the world without questioning.' This innate understanding of and empathy with Tchaikovsky's world translate into performances that touchingly capture all its brooding melancholy, yearning, desolation (has 'Dialogue' from the Op 72 collection ever sounded so poignant?) – and, by contrast, its uninhibited, exuberant joy (try 'February' and the middle section of the Dumka).

Whether or not the interpretative pleasures of the disc trump its auditory shortcomings and encourage repeated listening remains, for this listener, a moot point. What is not in doubt is that Boris Bloch (*b*1951, Odessa), a great-grand-pupil of Paul Pabst, whose transcription of 'Wiegenlied' ends the recital, is a considerable musician.

Jeremy Nicholas

Magda Tagliaferro



'The Complete 78rpm Solo and Concerto Recordings & Selected Chamber Recordings' **Albéniz** Cantos de España – Seguidillas. Suite española – Sevilla **Chopin** Fantaisie-impromptu, Op 66. Impromptu No 1, Op 29. Waltz No 5, Op 42 **Debussy** Estampes – No 3, Jardins sous la pluie. Pour le piano **Fauré** Andante, Op 75^a. Ballade, Op 19^b. Impromptus – No 2, Op 31; No 3, Op 34. Violin Sonata No 1, Op 13^a **Granados** Rondalla aragonesa **Hahn** Piano Concerto^c. Romance^a. Sonatine **Mendelssohn** Étude, Op 104^b No 2. Kinderstück, Op 72 No 4 **Mompou** Jeunes filles au jardin. La rue, le guitariste et le vieux cheval **Mozart** Piano Concerto No 26, 'Coronation', K537^d. Piano Sonatas: No 11, K331 – Ronda alla turca; No 18, K576 – Allegretto **Saint-Saëns** Piano Concerto No 5, 'Egyptian', Op 103^e **Schumann** Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op 26. Romance, Op 28 No 2 **Weber** Rondo brillante, Op 62 **Magda Tagliaferro** *pf*^a **Denise Soriano** *vn*
^aLamoureux Orchestra / Jean Fournet; ^cOrchestra;
^dPadeloup Orchestra / ^{cd}Reynaldo Hahn;
^bOrchestre du Gramophone / Piero Coppola
 APR © ③ ⓘ APR7312 (3h 53' • ADD)
 Recorded 1928-54



I heard Magda Tagliaferro only once: she played at the Naumburg Bandshell

in Central Park at the conclusion of the New York Gay Pride March in the mid-1970s. Young as I was, she seemed ancient, and we wondered who had prevailed upon this elegantly attired little lady to play with orchestra for what was, just a few years after Stonewall, still a fiercely militant and highly politicised event. But when she began to play the Chopin *Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante*, curiosity turned into amazement as she effortlessly commanded an outdoor audience numbering in the thousands.

Born in 1893 near Rio de Janeiro to French parents, Tagliaferro was taken to Paris at 13, where she joined Marmontel's class at the Conservatoire. It was her subsequent work with Cortot, however, that she considered lastingly influential. APR's new release presents all of Tagliaferro's 78rpm solo and concerto recordings, plus a handful of chamber works, in Ward Marston's excellent transfers and with elegant and informative booklet notes by Charles Timbrell. These recordings, made between 1928 and 1938, with a single post-war outlier from 1954, reveal a decisive musical sensibility of immense authority, imagination and charm, bolstered by an extraordinarily versatile technique.

Given Tagliaferro's close personal associations with Gabriel Fauré and Reynaldo Hahn, her interpretations of their music are of particular interest. Her approach to the Fauré Ballade is all shapely simplicity, with beautifully sculpted phrases and considerable dynamic subtlety. The contrasts of the Second and Third Impromptus are subtly captured, their idiosyncrasies lovingly portrayed with complete naturalness. Hahn's Piano Concerto, dedicated to Tagliaferro and here conducted by the composer, is played with great freedom and authority, making one wonder why this work hasn't been taken up by more pianists. Though Hahn's C major *Sonatine*, a tongue-in-cheek Scarlatti parody, is a less compelling piece, Tagliaferro brings it seriousness and gusto. There are also Fauré and Hahn works for violin and piano with Denise Soriano from early in the violinist's career.

A complete Debussy *Pour le piano* is here, the Prélude and Sarabande from 1930 and the Toccata, along with 'Jardins sous la pluie', recorded in 1932, in robust performances both original and compelling. Tagliaferro's Mendelssohn, including a brilliant F major Étude, is forthright and lyrical. Her Chopin is lean, charming and very French, with a *Fantaisie-impromptu* that comes very close to profundity. But of her performances of the early Romantics, it is her personal, atmospheric Schumann that I find most impressive. The *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, for all its abandon, is richly detailed and powerful, while the exquisite F sharp major Romance is as heartfelt as anyone might wish.

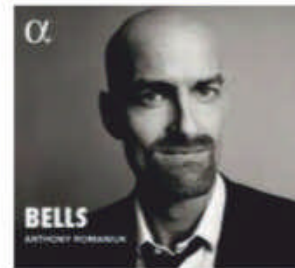
The Spanish school is represented by two evocative pieces of Mompou and a deliciously sensual Granados *Rondalla aragonesa*. When it comes to Albéniz's 'Seguidillas' (*Cantos de España*) and 'Sevilla' (*Suite española*), you're left wishing she had recorded more. Though unmistakably of its historical moment, Tagliaferro's Mozart is intelligent, texturally crystalline and rhythmically pert, with a beautifully balanced *cantabile* prevalent throughout. No occasion for drama is neglected in the *Coronation* Concerto, K537, in spite of a lacklustre orchestral accompaniment.

The only post-war recording, and the *coup de maître* of the set, is a bravura account of Saint-Saëns's *Egyptian* Concerto with Fournet and the Orchestre Lamoureux from 1954. Each movement is vividly characterised and the whole approached with a seriousness presaging some of the piece's more recent champions, such as Engerer and Chamayou.

This well-rounded set argues for a more prominent position among 20th-century pianists than Tagliaferro has generally been accorded in the anglophone literature. It also affords the pleasure of hearing an artist whose every gesture seems deeply considered in performances that nevertheless exude spontaneity and the joy of making music. **Patrick Rucker**

'Bells'

Anonymous Orlof, vrouwe, ende ic moet gaen (Het Gruuthuse-Handschrift)^a **JS Bach** English Suite No 2, BWV807 – Prélude (two versions^{a/b}); Bourrée^c **Bartók** Mikrokosmos, Sz107 – No 138, Bagpipe Music^b. Romanian Folk Dances, Sz56 – No 3, Pê-loc^d **Beethoven** Bagatelle, Op 126 No 4^b. Piano Sonata No 15, 'Pastoral', Op 28 – Rondo^d **Byrd** The Bells^c **Corea** Children's Song^a **Crumb** Makrokosmos, Vol 2 – No 4, Twin Suns^b **Debussy** Préludes, Book 1 – No 2, Voiles^b **Ligeti** Musica ricercata – No 7, Cantabile, molto legato^b **Mompou** Música callada^b: Book 1 – No 5, Legato metallico; Book 2 – No 13, Tranquillo **Mozart** Adagio, K540^d **Purcell** Fantasia Upon One Note, Z745^b **Rameau** Pièces de clavecin – No 7, Musette en rondeau^c **Romaniuk** Improvisation on Der Leiermann^d. Kora (improvisation)^c **Shostakovich** Prelude and Fugue, Op 87 No 1^b **Anthony Romaniuk** *pf*^a*fp*^d*hpd*^a Fender Rhodes Alpha ⓘ ALPHA631 (78' • DDD)



Playlist culture dominates today's piano scene, with more and more

artists favouring thematic or conceptual programmes from short stand-alone pieces and single movements of large-scale compositions. The present recital is a case in point, where Anthony Romaniuk puts his multi-keyboard classical and improvising skills to the test, alternating between concert grand, harpsichord, fortepiano and the once ubiquitous Fender Rhodes electric piano.

Romaniuk starts out on acoustic piano, where the unfettered melodies and droning accompaniment of Bartók's 'Bagpipe Music' segue into a deliciously brisk and supple Bach A minor *English Suite* Prelude. He repeats the Prelude on the Fender Rhodes at a slower pace. He follows a curvy reading of Debussy's 'Voiles' with an incisively articulated seventh movement from Ligeti's *Musica ricercata*. Byrd's *The Bells* and 'Twin Suns' from Crumb's *Makrokosmos* Book 2 audaciously juxtapose, followed by a drivingly lean and mean Beethoven B minor Bagatelle, Op 126 No 4.

After two slow and beautifully played Bartók and Mompou selections, Romaniuk turns to the fortepiano, where he eases his way into Mozart's B minor *Adagio* with an improvised introduction that's closer to Keith Jarrett than to Wolfgang Amadeus. A vital and crisply delineated fortepiano performance of the Rondo from Beethoven's Op 28 makes me curious to hear Romaniuk's take on the entire sonata. The distinctive yet arguably dated timbre of the Fender Rhodes may lead you to mistake an anonymous Flemish piece from around 1300 for jazz pianist Les McCann warming up circa 1972. An eloquently restrained improvisation featuring a reiterated C natural pedal point in the left hand assiduously slips into Shostakovich's C major Prelude and Fugue. It's a perfect piece for Romaniuk to decompress from his eclectic, imaginatively programmed keyboard journey. **Jed Distler**

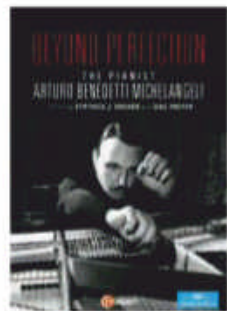
'Beyond Perfection'

'The Pianist Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli'

A film by **Syrthos J Dreher** and **Dag Freyer**

C Major Entertainment ©  755208

(79' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)



In 1992 Dag Freyer and the late Syrthos J Dreher set out to make a film about Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. They

pursued the reclusive pianist to no avail, yet managed to shoot behind-the-scenes footage of the production crew preparing to document his 1992 Munich performance of Ravel's G major Concerto. Given the pianist's reputation for perfectionism and tendency to cancel more concerts than he actually played, everyone involved appears to be on tenterhooks. Afterwards, the pianist orders the recording destroyed, apparently due to a lighting mishap.

After Michelangeli's death in 1995, the film-makers continued their journey, tracking down the pianist's friends, colleagues and associates, along with rare rehearsal and concert recordings. The resulting film may not completely penetrate the Michelangeli mystique, yet it opens up more than a few windows. Angelo Fabbrini, for example, had to be as much a psychologist as a piano technician when dealing with Michelangeli's flare-ups. At the same time, Fabbrini recalled how the pianist's hypersensitive touch led to the discovery of a minuscule imperfection in a single hammer. Having served as Michelangeli's record producer between 1975 and 1990, Cord Garben offers the

film's most extensive personal and artistic insights. He analyses the pianist's remarkable technical abilities and physical attributes, if not entirely warming to certain interpretations. He pinpoints the central episode of Chopin's Op 33 No 4 Mazurka as a magical moment, where Michelangeli seemingly suspends the tempo: it's not what Chopin writes, yet the effect is 'sensational'.

After mulling over possible collaborators for an upcoming Mozart concerto project, Michelangeli insisted that Garben himself conduct. Footage from the rehearsals shows the pianist dominating the proceedings rather impatiently, together with casual, ruminative moments alone at the keyboard. By contrast, Countess Marcella di Pontello remembers the younger, less austere Michelangeli as her frequent house guest, regaling her with *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The key to Michelangeli's artistry, of course, lies in the musical examples. Only one work appears in its entirety: the enigmatic unison finale of Chopin's Piano Sonata No 2, filmed at the 1967 Salzburg Festival. Michelangeli's fusion of speed, equilibrium and sheer evenness makes one wonder about the three earlier movements from the same source. Other rarities include a snippet of 'Le gibet' from Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* filmed at La Grange de Meslay, and a breathtaking Scarlatti excerpt from 1949. We also hear the audience tape that preserves the most harrowing moment of Michelangeli's performing career, when he suffered an aortic aneurism in the middle of Debussy's 'Ondine' during his Bordeaux recital of October 17, 1988. It's rather eerie yet oddly moving to experience Michelangeli stopping in mid-air, then quietly calling out for help, as if the myth had momentarily shed his impenetrable mask. **Jed Distler**

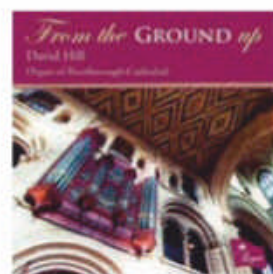
'From the Ground Up'

Alcock Introduction and Passacaglia **Blackford** Prelude and Passacaglia **Gibbons** Ground, MB26

Grace Resurgam. Reverie on the Hymn Tune 'University' **Murrill** Carillon. Postlude on a Ground **West** Passacaglia **Willan** Chorale Prelude on a Melody by Orlando Gibbons. Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue, Op 149 **David Hill** *org*

Regent © REGCD539 (68' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Peterborough Cathedral



How impoverished the organist's repertory would be without that humble but ever so

effective musical form, the Passacaglia. From the freshness of Frescobaldi's first foray, almost 400 years ago, to the increasingly tortuous Teutonic examples by Karg-Elert, Reger et al, the triple-time, repeating ground-bass pattern provides an excellent compositional discipline for composers of all generations and schools.

The best exemplars should grow organically from simple roots to a magisterial denouement. David Hill's gorgeously coherent programme from Peterborough showcases some of the best of the genre by a septet of English-born composers, starting with Walter Alcock's cornerstone *Introduction and Passacaglia* of 1933. He captures the work's nobility with authority and grace, aided by the cathedral organ's recently acquired Tuba Mirabilis. A brace of Herbert Murrill's pithy organ pieces provides a clever contrast. The sinewy *Postlude on a Ground* does not outstay its welcome and the *Carillon's* merry ostinato chatters away cleanly and with élan.

Hill makes a good case for John West's Passacaglia in B minor. Again, it does what it says on the box and would make a perfect model for a budding writer on how to squeeze the maximum variation from a slim idea. One hopes that its dedicatee, Josef Rheinberger, would have been equally delighted by it. The contrasting moods of Harvey Grace's *Resurgam* of 1922 also work well, proving to be more memorable than his *Reverie on 'University'*.

The leap back to the 17th century and Orlando Gibbons's Ground is less dramatic than one might fear, and leads on smoothly to Healey Willan's effortless Gibbons-inspired Chorale Prelude. This is prefatory to the main dish of the feast – Willan's mighty *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue* (composed in 1919, and not posthumously in 1969, as the otherwise excellent notes state!). Here Hill gives his 89 stops full rein in a thoroughbred performance which combines commanding control with dramatic turbulence. An interpretation to relish.

Finally, Richard Blackford's recent *Prelude and Passacaglia* (2019) carries on stylistically from where Murrill left off 70 years earlier. Textures are inherently spiky (though clean), with further stylistic nods to those 1960s British organ-modernists Leighton, Mathias and Preston. This is a concise essay which is worthy of repeated hearings.

Needless to say that David Hill's enthusiasm for this generous programme shines through. This, combined with Gary Cole's immaculate engineering, makes this album a cause for celebration. **Malcolm Riley**

Nicola LeFanu

Unassuming and somewhat academic in her approach, this British composer deserves to be noticed, says **Hannah Nepilova**

Four and a half decades ago, when she was in her twenties, Nicola LeFanu looked set to become one of Britain's most distinctive composers. This was the mid-1970s, a good period in which to be a female composer (compared, at least, with what had come before), and major commissions were forthcoming. 'But by the '80s,' LeFanu recalls, 'things had become much more conservative.' The big orchestral commissions dried up, and to this day, large chunks of the composer's output remain uncommitted to disc, and thus unheard. So she is still something of an unknown quantity, especially given her tendency to sidestep categorisation. Unlike her mother, the composer Dame Elizabeth Maconchy, whose voice was instantly recognisable, LeFanu is a shape-shifter. Over the years she has taken inspiration from 14th-century France, Edo-period Japan (1603-1867) and the Native American Zuni, while flirting with various shades of grey between diatonicism, microtonality and atonality. It takes some digging to get to the core of this elusive musical personality.

And what is at the core? Some would say a passion for landscape – a passion lived out in a very literal way: as a child, LeFanu would regularly holiday in Ireland, the birthplace of her mother and librarian father, William LeFanu. As a student she spent her summers in Italy. In 1976 she joined the composer David Lumsdaine (her future husband) in Australia, where they travelled far and wide and camped in the outback. Time spent in the High Pyrenees and in rural America supplied her with 'the quiet and headspace' she needed to compose.

Like Britten, she trusts in the power of our imagination to fill in the gaps. She is not given to preaching or sensationalising

The sights encountered on those travels burrowed their way into her music, and nowhere more vividly than in one of her first orchestral commissions: *Columbia Falls*. Listening to this 1975 piece, named after a remote village in the US state of Maine, feels like staring at a glittering landscape on a distant horizon: there are lights, there are shapes, there are colours, but none quite in focus, because, rather than allowing a particular voice to take charge, LeFanu weaves the component parts – skittish melodic fragments and serene lyrical lines, speckled with jewel-like percussion sounds – into a sonic mist. In her own programme notes the composer, who refers to *Columbia Falls* as her 'coming-of-age' work, speaks of using 'bands of colour' and of how 'the perspective is always shifting' – painterly turns of phrase that could just as appropriately be applied to several of her pieces. Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that her music has often been described as 'pictorial'.

Yet whenever LeFanu is asked to sum up her output, she tends to reach for another adjective: dramatic. This, after all,



is someone who wrote and produced plays throughout her childhood with the aim of one day becoming a playwright. 'Imperceptibly music took over,' as she puts it, but even then she remained keenly interested in theatre, and describes producing *The Marriage of Figaro* at the age of 17 as one of the 'high spots' in her life. It was inevitable that her music would draw upon that passion; and it's significant, perhaps, that one of the first pieces to do so contained no human voices, text or anything else you would expect to find in the theatre: a short solo work for oboe called *Soliloquy*, which the composer wrote during her first year at the University of Oxford for fellow student Francis John Hunter.

This is, in effect, a wordless dramatic soliloquy, in which the oboe, like a character in a play, thinks aloud. Unfolding in a continuous train of thought, the music encompasses a whole range of moods and gestures, by turns dramatic and outgoing, reflective and introvert. At times it seems to be questioning itself. At others it scolds itself, frequently returning, with a neurotic abruptness, to initial ideas. For a few years, LeFanu would continue to pour all her theatrical zeal into music that was not designed to be performed in a theatre, namely symphonic and chamber pieces – and she loved doing it: 'I need the discipline and excitement of exploring pure music,' she says. 'How do you make it comprehensible to people? It's completely its own language.'

But it was when she started writing operas in the late 1970s that she found her natural milieu: 'It soon became addictive,'



she admits. She has since composed eight of them, the majority chamber operas. And LeFanu cuts no corners when it comes to inhabiting the world of her characters. Take *Light Passing*, her 2004 opera about the life of Clement VI, pope in Avignon at the time of the Black Death, for which the composer learnt plainsong notation, sang Machaut with friends, studied polyphonic works by Vitry and reread Petrarch and Boccaccio – all in an attempt to bring to life the late medieval era she was trying to depict.

This is symptomatic of a rigour that has won LeFanu many academic positions and accolades: she has three honorary doctorates in addition to her own DMus from the University of London, and she is emeritus professor at the University of York. Some would argue that she is, if anything, *too* academic – that some of her music is too cerebral to kick you in the gut. A case in point is *Tokaido Road*, her 2014 chamber opera based upon the Japanese artist Hiroshige's journey along the road between Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo) in 1832. Here is music that refuses to take the easy way out by conjuring up a saccharine, sentimentalised vision of an oriental culture. The score is economical, even brittle, in its determination to remain authentic, with the coloration from Japanese instruments always remaining discreet. The musical drama is very measured. Like Britten, LeFanu trusts in the power of our imagination to fill in the gaps. And yes, you could call the general approach somewhat dispassionate; a few critics have. Others, however, praised the composer for

LEFANU FACTS

Born April 28, 1947, Wickham Bishops, Essex, England

Studies 1965-68: St Hilda's College, Oxford; 1973-74:

Harkness Fellowship, Harvard University;

1988: graduates DMus, University of London

BBC Proms commission First large-scale orchestral work, *The Hidden Landscape* (1973)

Educator 1975-77: Director of Music, St Paul's Girls' School, London; 1977-94: King's College London; 1994-2008: Professor of Music, University of York


First opera *Dawnpath* (1976), premiered 1977 by New Opera Company, London

Marriage In 1979 marries fellow composer David Lumsdaine

Honours Honorary doctorates from the universities of Durham (1995) and Aberdeen (2006) and the Open University (2004)

refusing to tell the audience what to feel.

In a 2017 interview with *The Guardian*, LeFanu said, 'Music is not an appropriate medium for literal expressions of belief.' That's not to suggest that what she writes is divorced from her view of the world; in the same interview she highlighted the importance of 'bearing witness to the time I live in'. But her way of 'bearing witness' is a subtle one: this is not a composer given to preaching or sensationalising.

All of this comes to the fore in her most recent big piece, *The Crimson Bird*. This 2017 work for soprano and orchestra could so easily have gone in a very different direction. The subject matter concerns a woman whose child is caught up in war, while the text, taken from John Fuller's poem *Siege*, speaks of children dead in the dust, mortars exploding in the citadel: this could be the Syrian civil war. But LeFanu doesn't push the issue. Her score gives us sounds for their own sake, drawing on a large range of nebulous colours. There are eerie moans in the woodwind, pinpricks of light from the harp and percussion, whispers from the cellos. It's scrupulously ambiguous in its emotional content, poised somewhere hard to pinpoint between hope and despair. And it's precisely in this ambiguity that its emotional power lies. 

► The new NMC disc of orchestral works by LeFanu is reviewed on page 39

DISCOVER LEFANU ON DISC

Works large and small, spanning half a century of composing



Soliloquy

Gordon Hunt *ob*

BIS

Despite containing no words or text, this early work, written in 1966, is something of a precursor to LeFanu's operas, revealing her theatrical potential.



The Old Woman of Beare

Jane Manning *sop* Lontano / Odaline de la Martinez

Lorelt (9/92)

One of few theatrical works by LeFanu available on disc, this 1981 monodrama 'could only have been written by a woman' – according to the composer.



'The Crimson Bird and Other Orchestral Works'

Rachel Nicholls *sop* BBC SO / Ilan Volkov et al

NMC

This recent release is the first to profile a group of her large-scale orchestral works. The four pieces were written over a 45-year period: *The Hidden Landscape* (1973), *Columbia Falls* (1975), *Threnody* (2014) and *The Crimson Bird* (2017). Each one showcases her talent for capturing image in sound.

Vocal



Andrew Farach-Colton hears Latin American songs from Rolando Villazón:

'There are delightful discoveries – indeed, one of the joys of this recital is how pleasantly it wanders off the beaten path' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



David Vickers offers a round-up of recent Baroque albums:

'The Choir of Keble College, Oxford, excel in technical precision and articulate polyphonic detail' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**

JS Bach

'Redemption'

Cantatas: No 25 – Es ist nichts Gesundes an meinem Leibe^a; No 31 – Letzte Stunde, brich herein^b; No 44 – Es ist und bleibt der Christen Trost^b; No 57 – Ich ende behende mein irdisches Leben^a; No 82a^b – Ich freue mich auf meinem Tod; Ich habe genug; No 105 – Jesu, der du meine Seele; Wie zittern und wanken^b; No 115 – Bete aber auch dabei^b; No 127 – Die Seele ruht in Jesu Händen^b; No 135 – Ehr sei ins Himmels Throne^b; No 150 – Sinfonia; Leite mich in deine Wahrheit^a; Meine Tage in dem Leide^a; Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich^a; No 179 – Liebster Gott, erbarme dich^b; No 202 – Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten^b; No 208 – Schafe können sicher weiden. Wenn mein Stündlein vorhanden ist, BWV430

^{ab}Anna Prohaska ^{sop}^aSusanne Langner ^{mez}

^aChristian Pohlers ^{ten}^aKarsten Müller ^{bass}

Lautten Compagnie / Wolfgang Katschner

Alpha © ALPHA658 (78) • DDD • T/t



This is an album about music and coronavirus. Anna Prohaska, it would seem, had

been contemplating a disc of extracts from Bach's cantatas with Lautten Compagnie and Wolfgang Katschner for a while, ideas to which the outbreak of the pandemic gave added urgency. The recording was made under Covid restrictions in June in a Berlin church, the sessions illustrated in the accompanying booklet with shots of distanced performers, sometimes masked, and described, in some of the publicity material, almost as a series of impromptu get-togethers. Using a choir was an impossibility, so choruses are sung by four solo singers, Prohaska taking the soprano line. Chorales are given in instrumental arrangements, we are not told by whom.

We're also not told whether the impact of Covid-19 affected Prohaska's original intentions with regard to the programme, though what she gives us is very much an album about grief, acceptance and consolation. As with her 'Paradise Lost'

recital (7/20), we're very much aware of great intelligence and intellect at work, and the disc's emotional trajectory relates to the stages of grief, 'a blend of denial and anger as well as depression and acceptance', controversially outlined in the work of the Swiss-American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.

The opening is stark and notably austere, with 'Bete aber auch dabei' from Cantata No 115, followed by the chorus 'Es ist nichts Gesundes an meinem Leibe', and the chorale 'Ehr sei ins Himmels Throne', sombrely played by Lautten Compagnie's brass. Thereafter certainty and doubt alternate in arias suggestive of assertion and reflection. The chromatic unease of 'Wie zittern und wanken' comes as a jolt after the florid, almost breezy coloratura of 'Ich ende behende mein irdisches Leben'.

'Liebster Gott, erbarme dich', near the disc's mid-point, forms the anguished climax, after which the mood becomes increasingly serene, eventually reaching the quiet acceptance of death of 'Die Seele ruht in Jesu Händen'. A closing 'bonus track' returns to 'Bete aber auch dabei', now turned into an up-tempo jazz riff, very Jacques Loussier: you might think it belongs on a different album.

Purists may also not care for the way arias and choruses are taken out of context and refashioned into a new emotional narrative, and faced with Prohaska's juxtaposition of the opening and closing arias of *Ich habe genug*, I admit to wanting the cantata in its entirety. But the whole disc is done with such affecting sincerity that any qualms are simply swept away. Apart from a couple of phrases taken from below, Prohaska is in beautiful voice, her tone even and silvery, her coloratura accurate and expressive. 'Ich habe genug' dances almost joyously, and 'Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten' sounds exquisite. That the high tessitura of 'Liebster Gott, erbarme dich' results in the occasional occluded vowel adds to rather than detracts from its intensity. The jazz 'Bete aber' is terrific. In the choruses she's very much a member of an ensemble of equals, and as so

often when Bach is done with a single voice to a line, the counterpoint is blindingly clear. Lautten Compagnie's playing has an uncompromising, austere beauty and the string and woodwind obbligatos are simply ravishing. Extraordinarily moving, it really does offer consolation in dark times.

Do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

Brahms

'The Songs of Brahms, Vol 10'

Sechs Gesänge, Op 3 – No 1, Liebestreu; No 4, Lied. Murrays Ermordung, Op 14 No 3. Vier Gesänge, Op 43 – No 1, Von ewiger Liebe; No 2, Die Mainacht. Lieder und Gesänge, Op 57 – No 1, Von waldbekrönter Höhe; No 8, Unbewegte laue Luft. Fünf Romanzen und Lieder, Op 84 – No 1, Sommerabend; No 2, Der Kranz; No 3, In den Beeren. Zwei Gesänge, Op 91^a. Dort in den Weiden steht ein Haus, Op 97 No 4. Zigeunerlieder, Op 103. Fünf Lieder, Op 105 – No 2, Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer; No 3, Klage. Ständchen, Op 106 No 1. 49 Deutsche Volkslieder, WoO33 – Da unten im Tale; Es war ein schöne Jüdin; Der Reiter spreitet seinen Mantel aus; Es war ein Markgraf überm Rhein; Du mein einzig Licht; Es steht ein Lind

^{Sophie Rennert} ^{mez}^aLawrence Power ^{va}

Graham Johnson ^{pf}

Hyperion © CDJ33130 (79) • DDD • T/t



'Springing like Minerva fully armed from the head of Jove' was Robert

Schumann's euphoric verdict when the 20-year-old Brahms visited him in Düsseldorf in 1853. One of the works that excited Schumann was 'Liebestreu', the Brahmsian equivalent of another early song masterpiece, 'Gretchen am Spinnrade', in its mingled technical certainty and expressive power. It makes an apt opener to Sophie Rennert's recital, the final volume in Graham Johnson's complete Brahms survey. Supported by the ever-observant, ever-sympathetic Johnson, the young Austrian mezzo responds vividly

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Anna Prohaska*

The Austrian soprano discusses the circumstances and programming behind her latest album, 'Redemption'

Did this album arise directly out of the circumstances of lockdown?

Wolfgang Katschner and I have known each other for a long time – I sang with the Lautten Compagnie as a student and have enjoyed their recordings over the years. We finally sat down a couple of years ago to plan various projects together, and the Bach cantata idea was one of them. It wasn't supposed to be the first, but in the face of recent events it felt the right project. Bach's cantatas are hugely varied in their musical texture, from chamber-music intimacy to grand orchestral colours, all achieved with a minimal line-up. We reduced the chorus to solo parts, four singers in total, to follow social distancing rules. Otherwise we have kept strictly to Bach's instrumentation.

The album has a sense of consolation that feels appropriate and very moving. Did you choose Bach for this reason?

Aside from the recording signifying a kind of salvation for us musicians – being able to make music in the same space, rather than at home either alone or online – we wanted to send out a signal of hope: that even during a pandemic and when cultural politics seems to abandon us, music cannot be killed off. We were in the middle of lockdown – in fact legally it was a grey area – and in these desperate times (not just regarding Covid but also world politics and climate change), Bach's music is like a consoling hand. For

agnostics it can be a quasi-divine guidance, prompting us to think about our place in the world. Bach never abandons us!

The booklet note describes the programme as relating to the four stages of grief, from denial and anger to depression and acceptance. How did you put these elements together?

The question that particularly interested me was whether a Protestant in the Baroque era viewed sin as a festering sickness that manifested itself physically, or as something imposed on him from outside, by God. In our programme it is as if the suffering sinner takes us by the hand and leads us through all the psychological highs and lows he encounters while preparing for death. One might think this is not a very consoling prospect in the face of the world's current challenges – but that is reckoning without Bach, who invariably manages to set the most depressing pietist texts with a glimmer of hope shining through. Think of the angelically soaring obbligato oboe solo in the aria 'Letzte Stunde, brich herein', or the solo flute in 'Ich habe genug' complementing the voice like a shadow, as if the soul were evaporating into the heavens while the body, the human voice, is clinging to life.



Did you intend that the album should be heard as a single entity?

One probably does benefit from listening to it as a whole programme. Rock bottom is reached in the final third of the album with the raw desperation of 'Liebster Gott, erbarme dich' and passive acceptance in 'Ich habe genug'. By the time we reach 'Die Seele ruht' it's almost an out-of-body experience as the narrator describes what is happening to his own soul. The clouds shift, and the ray of light of the solo oboe and the imitating soprano voice burst through in 'Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten'. Ironically, this is the only secular aria on the album – perhaps an enlightenment in more than one sense ...

to each phase of the mother-daughter dialogue, finding an unforced depth of tone for the mother's words and a limpid *pianissimo* – 'träumerisch' ('dreamy') as Brahms requests – for the abandoned girl's response. With almost imperceptible quickenings of the pulse, vindicating their unusually slow opening, singer and pianist create a sense of ineluctably mounting tension right through to the searing close.

Brahms was always drawn to the chiaroscuro of the mezzo-soprano voice and its instrumental equivalents, the clarinet and the viola. I suspect that Sophie Rennert's tones, combining an amber glow with the freshness of youth and a free-soaring top, would have come somewhere near his ideal. She phrases broadly and

expressively, and points and colours words with unexaggerated sensitivity. Her diction throughout is a model. Rennert balances artlessness and dramatic involvement in the many folk songs and quasi-folk songs (Brahms was a dab hand at inventing pseudo-folk), and is a keen storyteller in the grisly ballads 'Lied' and 'Murrays Ermordung', two of many welcome rarities here. Amid so many Brahms songs of loss, longing and abandonment, Rennert seizes the moment when the mood brightens: say, in 'Von waldbekränzter Höhe', its erotic excitement urgently caught, or the sensuous stillness of 'Unbewegte laue Luft', a song for 'a slimmed-down Brahmsian Isolde', as Johnson puts it in his probing notes.

Occasionally, as at the openings of 'Die Mainacht' and the deathbed song 'Immer leiser' – both notorious tests of legato – Rennert swells into individual notes rather than spinning an unblemished line. In both 'Die Mainacht' and 'Von ewiger Liebe' the initial tempo might seem dangerously slow. 'Von ewiger Liebe' opens with an almost funereal tread, bereft of an underlying waltz lilt. But, as in 'Liebestreu', each of these great songs unfolds with a sure sense of growth and an illuminating range of colour. 'Die Mainacht' emerges as an intensely private, musing soliloquy, the huge lamenting phrase at 'Und die einsame Träne rinnt' expressively shaped in a single breath. Gerald Moore once described 'Von ewiger Liebe' – perhaps the most moving

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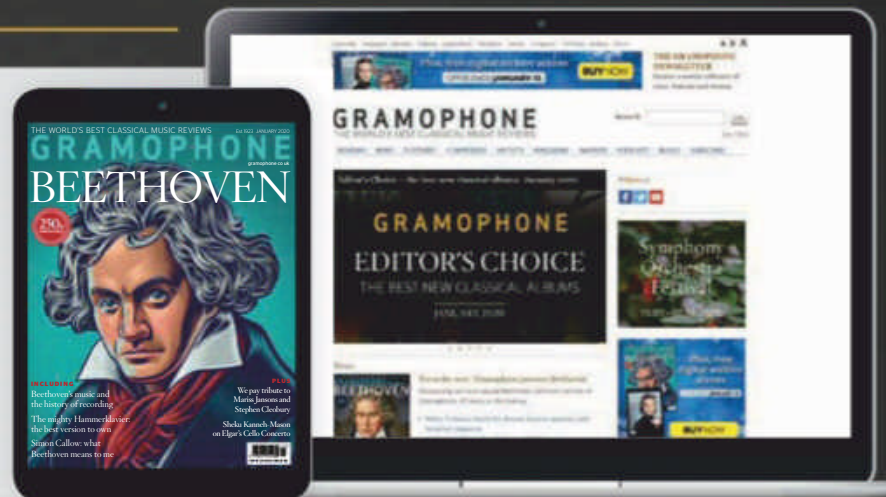


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A fitting culmination: mezzo-soprano Sophie Rennert joins pianist Graham Johnson, the architect of an outstanding survey of the songs of Brahms

expression of undying love in the entire lied repertoire – as ‘a big song, and it must be performed in a big way’. It is here. With subtly managed tempo changes, Rennert, mining the coppery depths of her mezzo, and Johnson (superb in the quasi-orchestral climax) catch both the boy’s impetuous unease and the girl’s increasingly impassioned certainty. The hushed intensity of her declaration of faith (‘Eisen und Stahl, man schmiedet sie um’) is a magical moment, truly *dolce*, as Brahms asks.

Among rival mezzos in this repertoire, Anne Sofie von Otter (DG, 4/91) brings more passion, and a sharper tinge of anxiety, to the two Op 91 songs. But in close communion with the eloquent Lawrence Power, Rennert compels with her inwardness and gently fluid phrasing in these love duets for voice and viola. Unfurling her bold chest tones, von Otter also displays a touch more sheer bravado in the *Zigeunerlieder*. Yet Rennert and Johnson capture both the gypsy swagger and (above all in the exquisite No 7) the tender melancholy of these songs, with a fine control of rubato that is a hallmark of this whole programme. A lovely singer, Sophie Rennert is a natural in lieder. Her partnership with Johnson makes a fitting culmination to what has proved a revelatory Brahms series. **Richard Wigmore**

Britten

Anonymous The Holly and the Ivy (arr Britten)
Britten A Ceremony of Carols, Op 28 (arr Julius Harrison). Deus in adjutorium meum intende. A Hymn of St Columba. Hymn to St Peter. A Hymn to the Virgin. Jubilate Deo in C. A New Year Carol, Op 7 No 5. Sweet was the song. The Sycamore Tree. Te Deum in C. Venite exultemus Domino **Bridge** Music, when soft voices die
Holst This have I done for my true love, Op 34 No 1 **Ireland** The Holy Boy
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross with **Tanya Houghton** *hp*
Eleanor Carter, Ashley Chow *org*
 Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5329 (75' • DDD • T/t)



Hit play on this new recording of Britten’s *A Ceremony of Carols* and you’ll get a shock.

Benjamin Britten may have approved Julius Harrison’s 1955 TrATB arrangement of his upper-voices work (though archival evidence suggests he later regretted this decision) but very few choirs have taken the opportunity to record it, making this a fascinating, if not always entirely persuasive addition to the catalogue.

Clare’s new account joins just three others. The idiosyncratic performance by the Boni Pueri on ArcoDiva (2004)

has its charm (particularly the fine treble solos), but the Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge, under Andrew Nethsinga offer what has been, until now, the definitive recording. The contrast between St John’s boys and Clare’s sopranos is just the beginning of two markedly different approaches.

Perhaps surprisingly there’s far more obvious muscularity of tone from Clare. There’s an irrepressible energy and earthiness to their performance that sometimes threatens to overwhelm the music’s simple shapes. We lose the transparency of texture John’s manage to preserve even in this arrangement, and text becomes muddled and obscured in the resonance and sometimes the sheer volume of the recording. These are more door-to-door wassailers than prim chapel carollers.

Both the energy and the slight lack of control continue through the rest of the repertoire – carols and anthems by Britten, with guest appearances from Bridge, Holst and Ireland. It suits the rough-hewn architecture of *A Hymn of St Columba* and the declamatory *Jubilate Deo* but becomes more problematic elsewhere – in the fragile *A Hymn to the Virgin*, where we lose that sense of shimmering otherness, of a conversation across the ages between the two choirs; in Ireland’s *The Holy Boy*, where the unison melody line too often scatters

into individual voices; and in Holst's *This have I done for my true love*, which pushes almost to the point of distortion in its final climax.

Shattering stereotypes of polite Oxbridge singing, there's an exciting, no-holds-barred conviction to the singing here. Whether it is shown to best advantage in the carefully polished precision of Britten's Christmas sequence is another matter.

Alexandra Coghlan

Ceremony of Carols – selected comparisons:

Cb of St John's Coll, Cambridge, Kelly, Netherlands

(3/12) (S7CR) S7CR105-2

Boni Pueri, Müllerová, Krček (ARCO) UP0070-2 231

Dussek

Messe solemnelle

Stefanie True *sop* **Helen Charlston** *mez* **Gwilym**

Bowen *ten* **Morgan Pearce** *bar* **Choir and Orchestra**

of the Academy of Ancient Music / Richard Egarr

AAM Records © AAM011 (60' • DDD • T/t)



The *Solemnal Mass* of Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812) appears to have been composed

for the name day in 1811 of the euphoniously monickered Princess Maria Josepha Hermenegilde Esterházy (née Liechtenstein). She it was who was entertained annually by Haydn's six late Masses, as well as by later such works by the likes of Hummel and Beethoven (his Mass in C), despite her husband's lack of interest in music much beyond simple march tunes. Dussek is best known now via his teaching pieces for piano, although he was a versatile and wide-ranging composer, popular in his day and accompanied by a whiff of scandal that saw him criss-cross the continent, covering an area from St Petersburg to London as he fled revolution, bankruptcy, accusations of sedition and, shamefully, his wife and daughter.

There is no proof that the Mass was performed at the time and it has since been known only as an entry in a Florentine library catalogue. Richard Egarr, intrigued, managed to extract the manuscript and have it edited for a performance in October 2019 that might well have been its first, and for this subsequent premiere recording. It's an imposing work, ranging widely in mood but without the tautness that so characterises Haydn's late Masses; in terms of language, it sits somewhere between Haydn and a constellation consisting of the likes of Beethoven, Cherubini and even Berlioz. Choral writing alternates with sweet-sounding solos and ensembles – especially a charming 'Benedictus' – and is

not without some well-crafted counterpoint at the traditional points. Perhaps there is little of real depth, although an emotional response is hinted at in the hushed urgency of the 'Sanctus' and 'Agnus Dei'.

Dussek himself could scarcely have hoped for a performance as fine as this one, with the Academy on top form, a well-drilled choir of 20 clearly in thrall to Egarr's infectious enthusiasm for the work and four finely matched soloists imparting plenty of personality. The presentation, too, is worthy of the evangelical nature of the project, with a 100-page booklet containing biographical and musicological essays, bespoke artwork, performance photos and facsimiles of the manuscript, not to mention recipes for treats that Dussek might well have consumed – he clearly enjoyed food and liquor, and died, corpulent and gouty, not long after writing the Mass. It's a fascinating work and an important project, impressively recorded, exquisitely presented and enthusiastically recommended. **David Threasher**

Haydn

Die Schöpfung, HobXXI:2

Anna Lucia Richter *sop* **Maximilian Schmitt** *ten*

Florian Boesch *bar* **Bavarian Radio Choir;**

Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini

Alpha ® ② ALPHA567 (100' • DDD • T/t)



Haydn's joyous celebration of an idyllic, prelapsarian world seems

particularly poignant in an age when our guardianship of the planet is ever more precarious. And joy is the essence of this new recording from Giovanni Antonini, taking time off from his Haydn symphony odyssey. Based on just 12 violins, his lively orchestra is on the small side. Yet I never felt short-changed. With the muted strings conjuring a glassy *pianissimo*, Chaos has an ideal mix of murkiness and eerie clarity. The flavoursome timbres of the period wind, from faintly puffy bassoon to deliciously woody flute, are enchantingly heard in Gabriel's avian aria and the gambolling love duet for Adam and Eve. Many of the solo numbers have a chamber-musical intimacy. But except for a smartly paced Sunrise, Antonini and his forces never stint on the oratorio's grandeur. Orchestra and the firm-toned Bavarian choir (with a notably incisive alto line) pack a powerful punch in the big choruses, not least in the thrillingly clinched climax of 'Die Himmel erzählen'. Antonini pushes the tempo of the trio and chorus 'Der Herr

ist gross' to the edge of the possible. But it works, with Anna Lucia Richter and Maximilian Schmitt blithely tossing off their coloratura flourishes like trails of angelic laughter.

Soprano and tenor soloists, both fresh and youthful of tone and elegant in style, give pleasure throughout. Richter sings 'Nun beut die Flur' with a natural grace and playful added touches of ornamentation. Schmitt veils his bright lyric tenor in a tender evocation of the first moonrise and the creation of Eve. Florian Boesch's Raphael, baritone rather than bass, is more controversial: a Lieder-singer's detail, vivid imagination, humour in his zoological recitative, yet for my taste too much stabbing at individual notes, as in the serene close of 'Rollend in schäumenden Wellen'; and I wish he hadn't attempted a disgusted-sounding gurgle of a bottom D on 'Gewürm'. Boesch is more convincing as a gentle, sensitive Adam (like Haydn himself, Antonini uses just three soloists). In their love duet he and Richter's smiling Eve sound more than ever like Papageno and Papagena transplanted to Eden.

Competition among similarly scaled and conceived performances in German is formidable. There are invigorating versions from Gardiner (Archiv, 4/97), Harnoncourt (DHM, 5/04), Christie (Virgin/Erato, 2/08), Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi, 11/09), Herreweghe (PHI, 12/15) – I could go on, but won't. Antonini now joins the list. Harnoncourt, with a uniformly first-rate cast, is the most broadly paced, and the most attuned to the mystery and majesty of creation. If Antonini can occasionally be brisk to a fault, he catches as exhilaratingly as anyone both the spirit and the letter of Haydn's unsullied vision. **Richard Wigmore**

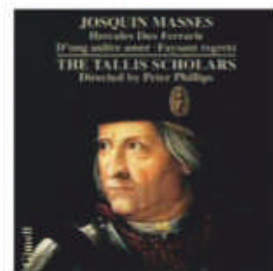
Josquin

Missa D'ung aultre amer. Missa Faysant regretz.

Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell © CDGIM051 (72' • DDD • T/t)



This ends a hugely enjoyable project begun in 1986, not originally envisaged

as a complete cycle of Josquin's Masses but which spawned consistently superb releases until completion became inevitable. This final disc is described by Phillips as 'a perfect showcase for [Josquin's] genius' and presents a trio of early-middle works offering some exquisite textures. Who better to navigate such extraordinary music than the masters of tranquillity and clarity



Il Giardino Armonico and Giovanni Antonini are joined by the Bavarian Radio Choir and outstanding soloists in a joyous account of Haydn's *Die Schöpfung*

themselves, The Tallis Scholars? Their exacting style delineates the distinctive sound world of each Mass while maintaining a consistent sonic beauty.

Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie is based on eight notes derived from the vowels of the Duke's name. As Phillips explains: 'Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara ... liked to hear his name sung obviously and often.' The tenors shimmer brightly on this repeated tune while the *superius* (uppermost) line is gentle and understated. An enjoyable comparison can be made with The Hilliard Ensemble (EMI/Erato, 5/90), whose strong countertenors draw more focus to the top of the texture. As ever, one greedily awaits the canonic passages in The Tallis Scholars' performance since their glassy serenity lends itself to such textures. The six-voice *Agnus Dei* is sublime.

Missa D'ung aultre amer must be Josquin's shortest Mass, mostly syllabic, with telescoped texts creating a concise texture brightened by an attractive wide upwards leap in the top voice borrowed from Ockeghem's motet on which it is modelled. Knowing this older composer's importance to Josquin, it's a delight to hear his music infusing this final disc.

Missa Faysant regretz uses material drawn from an earlier rondeau by Frye or Binchois. Here the *Agnus III* is stunning: Josquin's inventiveness in creating such a finely spun texture over a repeating tenor

part is extraordinary. This glossily perfect performance pings with relish and crackles with energy. A superb end to a magnificent cycle of recordings. **Edward Breen**

Mahler

'Erinnerung'

Lieder aus 'Des Knaben Wunderhorn' - No 2, Verlor'ne Müh; No 4, Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?; No 5, Das irdische Leben; No 6, Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt; No 7, Rheinlegendchen; No 9, Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen. Lieder und Gesänge - No 2, Erinnerung; No 3, Hans und Grethe; No 5, Phantasie aus Don Juan; No 7, Ich ging mit lust durch einen grünen Wald^a; No 11, Ablösung im Sommer; No 12, Scheiden und Meiden; No 13, Nicht wiedersehen. Rückert Lieder. Symphony No 4 - Das himmlische Leben^a

Christiane Karg *sop* **Malcolm Martineau**,

^a**Gustav Mahler** *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5338 (67' • DDD • T/t)



For her first solo album for Harmonia Mundi, German soprano Christiane

Karg turns to Mahler, joined at the piano by her regular accompanist, Malcolm Martineau and, for the last two tracks, Mahler himself. Well, sort of: she sings to the accompaniment of Mahler's Welte-

Mignon piano roll 'recordings' of 'Ich ging mit Lust' and 'Das himmlische Leben'.

It's fascinating, of course, but I admit to just wishing that Martineau had been playing for these two songs as well, so sparkingly vivid and full of wit are his accompaniments throughout the rest of the album. The composer's playing, as transmitted down to us here at least, is rhythmically full of little surprises, admittedly, but also somewhat lumpy and, well, distant – faded sepia in contrast to Martineau's crystalline full colour.

In fact, soprano and pianist offer one of the most enjoyable Mahler song discs to have come my way in a long time. It's a beautifully constructed programme, for a start, with the *Rückert Lieder* sounding especially fresh and intimate at the centre of a selection of Wunderhorn and pre-Wunderhorn settings. And Karg's artistry, distinguished by natural intelligence and vivid sense of communication, is an ideal complement to Martineau's.

Her voice is beautiful, more velvety than diamantine, and, with her supremely sensitive partner, she never has need to push it. She conjures up charming innocence and rusticity well without ever overplaying (the opening 'Rheinlegendchen' is irresistible) but is no less adept at the emotional challenges of 'Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen', beautifully tender and hushed. She and Martineau bring constant



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interest to a performance of 'Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt' at a steadier tempo than we often hear it.

The performance of the *Rückert Lieder* is superb, too: 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft' is suitably airborne, 'Um Mitternacht' communicates a vivid sense of what's at stake and 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' is as moving as it should be. In short, this is lieder performance of wonderful freshness and intelligence; a delightful album, highly recommended.

Hugo Shirley

Mozart

Betulia liberata, K118

Sandrine Piau, Amanda Forsythe *sops*

Teresa Iervolino *mez* Pablo Bemsch *ten*

Nahuel Di Pierro *bass* Accentus;

Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset

Aparté (M) ② AP235 (131) • DDD • T/t



The story from the Apocrypha of the Israelite widow Judith's murder of the

Assyrian king Holofernes – repulsive or uplifting, according to taste – inspired reams of 18th-century oratorios, most famously Vivaldi's *Juditha triumphans*. Composed for Padua in 1771 but probably never performed, Mozart's only oratorio *Betulia liberata* sets Metastasio's version of the story, in which, typically, drama takes second place to religious moralising. The climax here is less Judith's triumphant return to Bethulia after performing the deed 'offstage' (banqueting Holofernes, then chopping off his head as he lies in a drunken stupor) than the conversion to the true faith of the Assyrian Achior.

The teenage Mozart could not wholly avoid the long-winded formality endemic to Metastasian oratorio. Gluck and Hasse are the evident models in a work predicated on lengthy, often virtuoso arias, interspersed with tracts of dry recitative. But by 1771 Mozart was becoming something more than a precocious musical mimic. Several numbers, especially those in the minor key, have a power and pathos that hint at the composer of *Idomeneo* a decade later.

Of a handful of earlier *Betulia* recordings, the pick are Leopold Hager, with a superb cast, and the period-instrument version directed by Michi Gaigg. Despite provisos, Christophe Rousset and his singers stand up pretty well to the competition. From the abrasive, fiercely accented D minor Overture, snarling horns to the fore, Rousset gets vividly coloured playing

from his period band. Both sopranos are outstanding. As the Israelite noblewoman Amital, Sandrine Piau is brilliantly incisive in her 'storm at sea' aria (indispensable to any Metastasio libretto), and sings her final prayer for mercy with limpid beauty of tone and phrasing. The lighter-voiced Amanda Forsythe, in a pair of smaller roles, excels in two of the oratorio's best arias, both in a minor key. A specialist in Rossini, the deep-toned contralto Teresa Iervolino makes Judith a more heroic figure than the pleasant but rather reticent Margot Oitzinger for Gaigg. Iervolino means business as she sallies forth on her mission in the bravura aria 'Parto inerme'.

While tenor Pablo Bemsch, as the Israelite governor Ozias, and bass-baritone Nahuel Di Pierro, as Achior, have fine, resonant voices, *forte* tends to be their default setting. Di Pierro thunders imposingly in his aria describing the terrifying Holofernes but is less convincing in lyrical mode. He sounds stolid in Achior's 'conversion' aria, turning what should be a graceful minuet into a dirge. Likewise, Bemsch makes rather a meal of his aria at the start of Part 2, dragged out to a ponderous 11'19" against under 8' in the rival recordings. Peter Schreier, for Hager, is a model here. Yet Bemsch, singing with firm, even tone, and Rousset vindicate their broad tempo for the impressive C minor prayer with chorus in Part 1. With rather livelier pacing and the best all-round cast, Hager would be my first choice for Mozart's intermittently inspired oratorio. But there's not much in it. Period instruments may sway it for some. I'm certainly glad to have heard this new recording, above all for the two sopranos and Teresa Iervolino's formidable Judith.

Richard Wigmore

Selected comparisons:

Hager (2/79^R) (PHIL) ➔ 475 7365

Gaigg (12/13) (CHAL) CC72590

Mozart · Seyfried

Mozart Requiem, K626 (ed Ostrzyga)

Seyfried Libera me

Gabriela Scherer *sop* Anke Vondung *contr*

Tilman Lichdi *ten* Tobias Berndt *bass*

Chorwerk Ruhr; Concerto Köln / Florian Helgath

Coviello (E) COV92009 (51) • DDD • T/t

Mozart · Neukomm

Mozart Requiem, K626 (ed Arman).

Vesperae solennes de confessore, K339

Neukomm Libera me

Christina Landshamer *sop* Sophie Harmsen *mez*

Julian Prégardien *ten* Tareq Nazmi *bass*

Bavarian Radio Chorus; Akademie für

Alte Musik Berlin / Howard Arman

BR-Klassik (M) ② 900926 (81) + 73 • DDD • T/t

Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich,

January 22-25, 2020

Disc 2: Introduction and interview (in German)



As the trend for recompleting Mozart's Requiem approaches its semicentenary, two new versions appear, each tackling the revered fragment in its own way. The German composer Michael Ostrzyga 'wanted to fathom the mysteries of the Requiem, attracted by the challenge of its contradictions and unconvinced by both questions posed and answers given so far'; he and the London-born composer-conductor Howard Arman in their own different ways strip Mozart's music of the clumsy traditional orchestration to fashion something both familiar and unfamiliar.

What does this mean for the listener? In the Introitus, most of the Sequenz and the Offertorium the essence of the music does not depart from what may be found in any choral society vocal score. You will, however, notice string lines slightly recontoured, woodwind brought to greater prominence or unexpected blasts of brass and drums; here and there a harmony has been rethought. Things get more complicated in the 'Lacrymosa', where Mozart drafted only the first eight bars; there's also the scribbled opening of a fugue for the ensuing 'Amen', discovered in the early 1960s. Both completers take this squib and flesh it out to full length, meaning that the 'Lacrymosa' has to be rejigged to lead into it, with Arman the most radical of the two in his continuation.

On the other hand, for movements where there is no physical material by Mozart, Arman leaves well alone, presenting the traditional version unrevised. Ostrzyga goes down the currently fashionable path of providing a sort of 'fantasy on themes by Mozart', presenting a redesigned 'Benedictus' that never quite goes where you expect and a 'Sanctus' recast in a startlingly *Giovanni*-ish D minor rather than the traditional D major. Whether you are persuaded by these interventions will depend on how receptive you are to new, intensely personal views of this warhorse that run counter to the tradition of a work that has been sung, cherished and argued over for well over two centuries. Each offers much food for thought, even if neither is likely to displace well-loved catalogue classics.

In terms of performance, Arman extracts full drama from the work with some

driving tempos, while Florian Helgath (for Ostrzyga) takes a rather more reflective approach, despite some decidedly precious dynamic interventions. Both disinter 19th-century attempts to append a *Libera me* to the work: Arman opts for one by Sigismund Neukomm composed for an 1821 performance of the Requiem in Rio de Janeiro, Helgath for an alternative by Ignaz von Seyfried from around 1800 that was also performed at Beethoven's funeral, perhaps in this unaccompanied male-voice setting rather than in Arthur Schoonderwoerd's SATB version with orchestra; both liberally paraphrase the Requiem at the appropriate words. Arman's well-filled disc also offers a vivacious *Solemn Vespers*. **David Threasher**

Requiem with Neukomm Libera me – selected comparison:

Malgoire (K617) K617 180

Requiem with Seyfried Libera me – selected comparison:

Schoonderwoerd (ACCE) ACC24338

Schumann

'Stille Liebe'

Zwölf Gedichte von Justinus Kerner, Op 35. Fünf Lieder, Op 40. Romanzen und Balladen II, Op 49 – No 1, Die beiden Grenadiere; No 2, Die feindlichen Brüder. Belsatzar, Op 57. Die Löwenbraut, Op 31 No 1. Tragödie, Op 64 No 3. **Samuel Hasselhorn** bar **Joseph Middleton** pf Harmonia Mundi © HMN91 6114 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Episodic ballads were hardly natural territory for Schumann, supreme master of

the lyric epigram. Songs like 'Belsatzar' and the sprawling, potentially absurd 'Die Löwenbraut' (jealous pet lion savages his mistress on the eve of her marriage) need a vivid dramatic presence if they are not to fall flat. They get it here. Samuel Hasselhorn's ductile baritone, with its dark middle register and free-ringing top, is a fine, wholesome instrument; and he uses it with imagination and an unexaggerated relish for the German language. From the ominous expectancy of Joseph Middleton's introduction, 'Belsatzar' maintains tension right through to the hushed terror of the close – a terrific performance, this. 'Die beiden Grenadiere' traces a crescendo of delirious bravado before the final collapse (Middleton invariably makes something special of Schumann's postludes). And with their mingled directness and colouristic flair, singer and pianist make a strong case for 'Die Löwenbraut', with its Hammer-horror climax, and another gory nonsense tale, 'Die feindlichen Brüder'.

Hasselhorn is rewarding, too, in the set of *Kerner Lieder*, Op 35, loosely unified by moods of loneliness, loss and melancholy before fading in inconsolable reverie. He is fresh and open, without heartiness, in the two extrovert 'wandering' songs that tap into 'Florestan' in Schumann's twin fictional personas. But the introspective 'Eusebius' rules, from the neo-Bachian 'Stirb, Lieb' und Freud', where Hasselhorn musters a melting head voice for the heartbroken lover's final words, through an unmawkish 'Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes' (its mystical remote modulations palpably felt by singer and pianist), to the trancelike stillness of the last two songs.

For my taste Hasselhorn is too forthright in the Schumannised *bel canto* of 'Stille Tränen', though he and Middleton build fervently to the final climax. Other baritones, notably Fischer-Dieskau (DG, 9/79), Wolfgang Holzmair (Philips, 2/14) and Christian Gerhaher (Sony, 2/19), have brought more inwardness and a more silken legato to this hit song among the *Kerner Lieder*. I also wanted more delicacy, more of a smile in the tone, in the first and last of the five 'exotically strange' (Schumann's epithet) Andersen songs, Op 40. But Hasselhorn is in his element in the three disturbing central songs: the sweet-sinister 'Muttertraum' (the final note of mockery perfectly judged), the grimly implacable 'Der Soldat', so prophetic of Mahler's doomed drummer-boys, and the skewed, frantic waltz of 'Der Spielmann', brilliantly characterised by singer and pianist. Minor qualms apart, this is a compelling debut recital from a young baritone who is clearly one of the most gifted and natural lieder singers of his generation. **Richard Wigmore**

'Serenata latina'

Abreu Tico-Tico no fubá^a **Aguirre** Caminito^b

Anonymous La llorona^b. Spanish Dance from

Cuzco, Peru (arr Grandjany)^a **Azevedo**

Braileirinho^a **Calvo** Gitana^b **Fuentes** La Bikina^b

Ginastera Canción al árbol del olvido^b. Cinco canciones populares argentinas, Op 10^b – No 1, Chacarera; No 2, Triste; No 3, Zamba **Guastavino**

Bailecito^a. La rosa y el sauce^b. Se equivocó la

paloma^b. Violetas^b **Nepomuceno** Coração triste,

Op 18 No 1^b **Ramírez** Alfonsina y el mar^b

Rodríguez En estos días^b. La vida^b **Sánchez de**

Fuentes Deseo^b **Souviron** Al banco solitario^b

^b**Rolando Villazón** *ten*^{ab} **Xavier de Maistre** *hp*

DG © 483 8238 (59' • DDD • T/t)



I find it a little odd that Rolando Villazón brings so much of the opera house with him

to this recital of Latin American songs – especially as the accompaniments are played on the harp, with its intimate, guitar-like associations, rather than a concert grand. It's understandable, perhaps, in a song like Julián Aguirre's 'Caminito' from 1900, whose vaulting, impassioned melody practically invites stentorian fervour, but surely not in Yvette Souviron's delicately coloured, almost Impressionist 'Al banco solitario', which Villazón caps with tiny *verismo* sobs.

And because so many of these songs have deep folkloric roots and thus require a certain artlessness, I find the tenor most compelling when he's at his most gentle and emotionally direct. Listen, say, to the feeling of quiet ecstasy he brings to Carlos Guastavino's 'La rosa y el sauce', or to how much heartache he conveys in the 72 seconds of Alberto Ginastera's 'Zamba'.

Villazón is in good voice throughout most of the programme, although I notice a certain hollowness in his tone at the lower end of his register – try Alberto Nepomuceno's 'Coração triste', for example, which seems to sit in a slightly uncomfortable spot for him. Still, he sings it beautifully, and it's such a delightfully wistful discovery, that such minor imperfections shouldn't put you off. Indeed, one of the joys of this recital is how pleasantly it wanders off the beaten path.

That said, I don't find the inclusion of the more contemporary material to be entirely successful. Part of the problem is that the tenor's interpretations are relatively ponderous. Seek out Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez's own recordings of his 'En estos días' (1977) and 'La vida' (1994), which are so light, as if he's singing to and for himself – which makes sense given the songs's discursive, Dylan-esque (Bob, not Thomas) qualities. Villazón is more persuasive in the traditional Mexican lament 'La llorona', where his lilting, plaintive performance is as moving in its own way as that of Chavela Vargas's.

Xavier de Maistre, who arranged all of the songs, is a wonderfully sensitive partner, and dazzles in the solo pieces peppered throughout the programme. Some detail in his playing is lost in the resonance of the Salle Colonne in Paris, alas, particularly in faster numbers such as Abreu's 'Tico-Tico no fubá' (made famous by Carmen Miranda), although the acoustic is flatteringly helpful to the singer. All in all, then, a tantalising taste of little-known repertory that richly repays further exploration.

Andrew Farach-Colton

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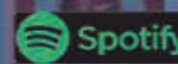
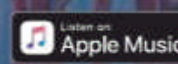


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FROM CREMONA TO FLORENCE

David Vickers guides us through a selection of recent albums exploring some fascinating byways of Baroque vocal music



Davide Ferella's mandolin plays an important part in the resuscitation of music by Carlo Arrigoni

Remembered (if at all) as Monteverdi's teacher in Cremona, **Marc'Antonio Ingegneri** receives overdue attention from the mixed Choir of Girton College, Cambridge, conducted by Gareth Wilson, and cornetts and sackbuts from London and Cardiff conservatoires (led expertly by Jeremy West). The music-making flows seamlessly between gentle compassion and fulsome sonorities in the eight-voice *Missa Laudate pueri Dominum* (based on a motet by Palestrina) and four triple-choir motets. Vowels could afford to be more Italianate in colour but polyphonic lines are intelligently delineated, textures are perfectly focused and there is emotional integrity. The diligently structured programme concludes with an eight-part offertory motet, *In spiritu humilitatis*, by Giovanni Croce – one of Monteverdi's Venetian predecessors at St Mark's.

On **Amor tiranno**, countertenor Carlo Vistoli sings a cross-section from Monteverdi's late Venetian secular works

in context alongside music by Cavalli, Ferrari, Saccati and Laurenzi. Music portraying broken-hearted lovers is accompanied vividly by Sezione Aurea, directed by harpsichordist Filippo Pantieri. Vistoli brings bittersweet theatricality to Apollo's sorrow upon Dafne metamorphosing into a laurel (Cavalli's *Gli amori d'Apollo e di Dafne*) and Diomede's misogynistic rant (Saccati's *La finta pazza*). Ottone's bickering spat with Lucia Cortese's taunting Poppea has sarcastic tension. Monteverdi's jaunty 'Ohimè, ch'io cado, ohimè' and melancholic 'Sì dolce è'l tormento' (Pantieri's micromanaged arrangement adds violins) are fussily overinterpreted.

The itinerant Sicilian **Bonaventura Aliotti** worked for a short period in Ferrara, where his oratorio *Il trionfo della morte per il peccato d'Adamo* was first performed in 1677. It is a good job the story of Adam and Eve's fall is so familiar – Accent's booklet only translates the libretto into French. Capucine

Keller's Eve eats the forbidden fruit at the culmination of a beguiling soliloquy that is instantly contrasted by a chorus of gloating demons. Adam's resistance crumbles during Eve's extraordinary lament 'Discioglietevi, dileguatevi', accompanied by four-part polyphonic viols of unfurling chromatic expressivity. Les Traversées Baroques' sensuous playing aptly illustrates the characteristics of godly Reason (soprano Anne Magouët), the secular worldliness of Death (countertenor Paulin Bündgen) and the dastardly yet charismatic Lucifer (bass Renaud Delaigue traversing some devilishly difficult music).

Chamber duets by **Agostino Steffani** from a collection revised and copied afresh for Queen Sophie Charlotte of Prussia (the Hanoverian sister of the future George I) are shared between a rotating team of five singers. Andréanne Brisson Paquin and Sherezade Panthaki interweave deftly in four duets, varying in mood from lightly tripping cheerfulness (*Cangia pensier, mio cor*) to lachrymose afflictions (*Ravvediti, mio core*). Each soprano takes turns with Reginald Mobley's supple countertenor in several intimate duets, including a setting of Sophie Charlotte's own poem *Crudo Amor, morir mi sento* (1698). In two duets Mobley is joined by bass Mischa Bouvier, whose precise agility evokes wafting breezes in the virtuoso solo opening of *Aure, voi che volate* (one of several duets receiving their first recording). Scott Brunscheen's gracefully shaded tenor is heard in several duets with each soprano, notably the intriguing *Io mi parto, o cara vita* (1700), composed for Sophie Charlotte's visit to the Bavarian elector Maximilian Emanuel. Harpsichordist and director Jory Vinikour nurtures sentimentality, wittiness, yearning and sorrow as each duet requires, and from time to time he is content to sit out and let cellist Alexa Haynes-Pilon and theorist Deborah Fox do the continuo talking. The recording is beautifully engineered and presented by Musica Omnia.

Antonio Nola was organist at Naples cathedral and had a close association with the nearby Girolamini monastery – to which he bequeathed his library of about 150 works composed between 1669 and 1713. Six of these unpublished pieces are championed expertly by Antonio Florio and Cappella Neapolitana in this live recording made at the Misteria Paschalia Festival in Kraków. The Eucharist solo motet *Sacramento laudes* is sung with purling fluidity by alto Marta Fumagalli, although the violin band's uneven

raggedness takes a while to resolve. *Homo et Angelo* is a lightly virtuosio dialogue between tenor Alessio Tosi and soprano Leslie Visco. A brief five-voice Easter motet *Tristes erant Apostoli* is uninteresting but a solemn four-voice *Stabat mater* (Holy Week 1699) is outstanding.

Alessandro Scarlatti was employed on and off at the Viceroyal chapel in Naples but a series of Tenebrae Responsories attributed to him might have been commissioned by the Medici for San Lorenzo in Florence during Holy Week 1708. Sergio Balestracci directs the 16 singers of La Stagione Armonica in nine Good Friday Responsories and four unrelated motets. Some questionable tuning from upper voices besmirches unaccompanied motets but there is greater security accompanied by a small chamber organ in Responsories that convey imploring fervour. Interspersed among the choral pieces are four of Scarlatti's substantial solo organ fugues, played splendidly by Carlo Steno Rossi on a restored 18th-century organ.

Francesc Valls spent most of his career in Barcelona. His late *Missa Regalis* (1740) is a five-voice contrapuntal Mass composed for King John V of Portugal. Extraordinary sequences of dissonant suspensions and harmonic invention ('Qui tollis') and a profoundly beautiful 'Crucifixus' exemplify the technical precision, shaded sonorities and articulate polyphonic detail achieved by the Choir of Keble College, Oxford – also qualities contributed by Joseph Crouch (bass violin), Inga Klaucke (dulcian) and Edward Higginbottom (organ). Director Matthew Martin plays the large four-manual organ of St John's College, Oxford, in several *tiento* pieces by earlier Spanish Baroque composers Francisco Correa de Arauxo and Juan Cabanilles. At only just over 40 minutes, the album is not generously filled – but Valls's Mass is fascinating and the music-making is top-notch.

The Neapolitan **Giuseppe Porsile** also worked in Barcelona before following his Habsburg patron to Vienna (the unsuccessful claimant to the Spanish throne became Emperor Charles VI). Five chamber cantatas are performed by La Cicala, directed by recorder player Inês d'Avena – although *Qual per ignoto calle* is probably by Vivaldi (it is catalogued as RV677). Stefanie True's stylish naturalness, unforced melodic ease and delivery are exceptional in the portrait of a spurned yet steadfast lover (*Le sofferte amare pene*),

a paean to the virtuous modesty of an April violet (*Violetta gentil*) and a lover's melancholic comparison of a spectacular sunrise to the woman who has stolen his heart (*E già tre volte*).

The theorbo/mandolin player and tenor **Carlo Arrigoni** spent most of his career in his native Florence, although during the mid-1730s he was in London and took part in Handel's first performances of *Alexander's Feast* (playing an archlute part in the Harp Concerto and singing solo tenor in the cantata *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo*). Surprisingly, neither Arrigoni's Handel connections nor his singing are mentioned in the booklet note. Accademia degli Erranti make an enjoyable case for resuscitating two continuo cantatas, and four arias with solo violin including the plangent lament *Dir ch'io non deggia piangere* and zesty *Infranti i ceppi del cieco amore* – all sung eloquently by Marta Fumagalli. These are accompanied skilfully by keyboard, cello, archlute and mandolin. It is a fascinating glimpse into the underexplored musical culture of late Baroque Florence. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Ingegneri Missa Laudate pueri, etc
Ch of Girton Coll, Cambridge / Wilson
Toccata Classics (P) TOCC0556



Various Cpsrs Amor tiranno
Vistoli; Sezione Aurea / Pantieri
Arcana (P) A474



Aliotti Trionfo della morte
Les Traversées Baroques / Meyer
Accent (P) 2 ACC24368



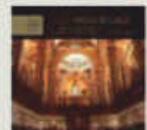
Steffani A son très-humble service
Sols; Vinikour
Musica Omnia (P) MO0802



Nola Tristes erant Apostoli
Cappella Neapolitana / Florio
Dynamic (P) CDS7853



A Scarlatti Responsories
La Stagione Armonica / Balestracci
DHM (P) 19075 94077-2



Valls Missa Regalis
Ch of Keble Coll, Oxford; AAM / Martin
AAM (P) AAM008



Porsile Mannaggia Amore
d'Avena, True; La Cicala
Passacaille (P) PAS1061



Arrigoni Tiranni affetti
Fumagalli; Accademia degli Erranti
Dynamic (P) CDS7878

'Sturm und Drang, Vol 2'

JC Bach Symphony, Op 6 No 6 **Gluck** Paride ed Elena^a – O del mio dolce ardor; Tutto qui mi sorprende ... Le belle immagini **Haydn** Symphony No 39. Stabat mater – Fac me vere tecum flere^a **Mysliveček** Semiramide – Tu mi disprezzi ingrato^a **Vanhal** Symphony, Bryan d1^a **Ida Ränslöv** *mez* **The Mozartists** / **Ian Page**
Signum (P) SIGCD636 (72) • DDD • T/t)



Ian Page and The Mozartists' second dip into the Classical-era repertoire subset called

Sturm und Drang alights on the *sine qua non* of that style, Haydn's Symphony No 39 in G minor (c1768), whose agitated language, riven with hiccups and non sequiturs, exerted a profound influence on composers across Europe. Many of them also adopted the work's unusual scoring, with four rather than two horns, crooked in different keys; given the limits of valveless instruments, this enabled more notes to be played and, indeed, for minor chords to be contrived (the harmonic series encompassed by these instruments lacks a minor third).

A number of copycat G minor symphonies in the manner of Haydn's were thus produced, not least by this ensemble's namesake composer (No 25, K183, 1773), but here they offer one by Mozart's boyhood idol JC Bach, who puts aside his customary *galant* manners for something uncharacteristically anguished in the last of his Op 6 Symphonies (published in 1770). Along with Haydn, one of the most assiduous cultivators of *Sturm und Drang* was the prolific Johann Baptist Vanhal, here represented by a D minor Symphony that seethes with frenzied passion but is not without passages of lyric repose. Swedish mezzo Ida Ränslöv is the soloist in a pair of restless arias from Gluck's *Paride ed Elena* ('Paris and Helen', first heard in Vienna in 1770) and a more hyperactive one from Mysliveček's first opera, *Semiramide* (1765), along with a chaste movement with plangent obbligato oboe (James Eastaway) from Haydn's *Stabat mater* (1767).

Page and his players once again demonstrate their total identification with this music in playing of dizzying drive and accuracy. Comprehensive notes by the conductor give not only the musical and historical background but welcome explanations of the dramatic situations of the operatic pieces. Once again, high artistry conspires with scholarship and strength of concept to create a programme that scintillates from start to finish.

David Thresher

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **Richard Whitehouse**'s point of departure is ...

Mendelssohn's Octet in E flat, Op 20 (1825)

The teenage Mendelssohn's preoccupation with chamber groupings culminated in this octet, trailblazing in terms not merely of its medium but also of its treatment of the strings. From the outset, the ensemble is one of eight soloists as well as a single entity abounding in gestures of orchestral power and weight. It is formally innovative in its subtle transfer of motifs between movements, and its youthful élan is evident in an absence of expressive inhibition. Such qualities are no less evident in the electrifying account recorded live at the 2008 Spannungen Chamber Music Festival and confirming that, almost two centuries on, Mendelssohn's Octet remains the greatest work by any teenage composer.

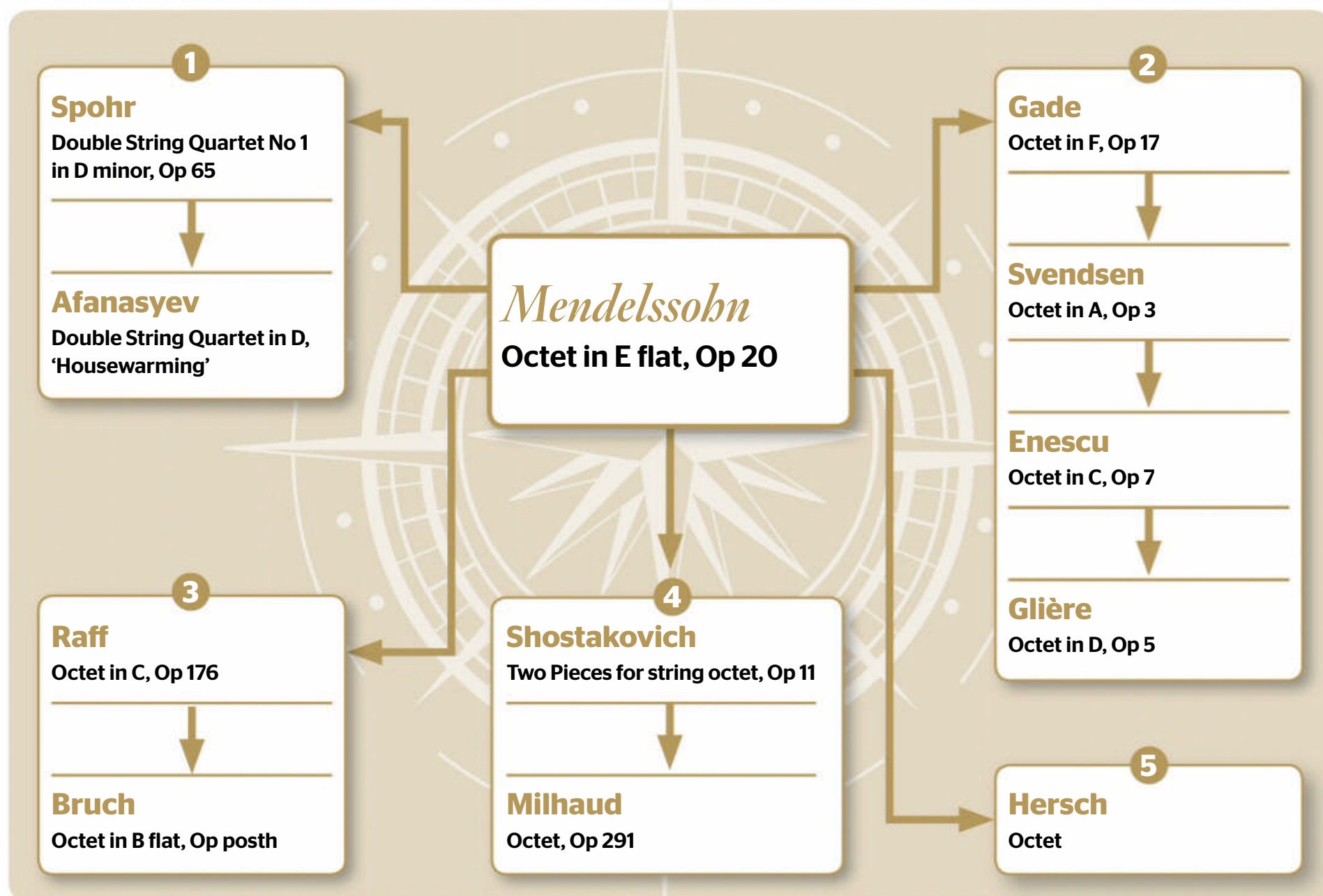
● C Tetzlaff, Faust, Batiashvili, Weithaas *vns* Roberts, Kam *vas*
T Tetzlaff, Viersen *vcs* (CAvi-music)

1 *Historical alternatives*

Spohr Double String Quartet No 1 in D minor, Op 65 (1823)

Prolific and innovative in the chamber domain, Spohr had completed and premiered the first of his double quartets only months before Mendelssohn seized the initiative. Essentially an expansion of the *quatuor brillant*, the first quartet pursues a soloistic role heard against the largely accompanying role of the second. Spohr was to evolve and refine his conception over three further such works, the last written (coincidentally) in the year of Mendelssohn's death.

● Heifetz, Amoyal, Baker, Rosenthal *vns* Harshman, Thomas *vas*
Piatigorsky, Lesser *vcs* (RCA, 9/90)



Afanasyev Double String Quartet in D, 'Housewarming' (c1875)

Long since relegated to a footnote in musical history, Nikolay Afanasyev (1821-98) was a pioneering spirit in Russian opera and chamber music, composing this double quartet for the inauguration of the St Petersburg Society for Chamber Music. Taking its cue from Spohr, the piece follows an outwardly classical format while being permeated by aspects of Russian folk music. Whatever the formal limitations, its charm and energy are never less than captivating.

- Oberton Octet (Ars Produktion)

2 Youthful ambition

Gade Octet in F, Op 17 (1848) Mendelssohn's death the previous year doubtless prompted Gade (who had already been championed by the older composer) to essay this octet as homage. Certainly, it comes nearest in technique and aesthetic to its predecessor by utilising its eight instruments individually and collectively in writing of sonorous warmth and expansive textures. In so doing, it set the tone for the technical mastery and sanguine eloquence of the four decades of creativity to come.

- Kontra Qt; Egendal, Lund Madsen *vns* Ranmo *va* Nygaard *vc* (BIS, 3/96)

Svendsen Octet in A, Op 3 (1866) His virtual cessation of composing when in his forties rather overshadowed those substantial achievements of Svendsen's early years. The Octet stands out for its imposing formal design and thematic ingenuity, alongside a questing harmonic sense as suggests the influence of Norwegian folk music infused with Wagnerian chromaticism. Such music set a precedent which this composer, increasingly in demand as a conductor, found himself unable to equal.

- Tharice Virtuosi (Claves, A/12)

Enescu Octet in C, Op 7 (1900) Enescu was three years older than Mendelssohn when he wrote his octet, more than fulfilling the earlier work's potential for contrapuntal intricacy and visceral immediacy. Allied to these are a harmonic freedom and a cyclical unity, whereby the four movements are integrated into a single overarching design. Rarely played (and then usually with conductor) until recent years, it is increasingly seen as a seminal piece on the cusp between the Romantic and modern eras.

- Frang, Schumann, Le Magadure, Philippens *vns* Power, Francis *vas* Altstaedt, Gustafsson *vcs* (Warner, 10/18)

Glière Octet in D, Op 5 (1900, rev 1902) One of several early works for string ensemble, Glière's Octet also recalls Mendelssohn with its emphasis on intensive dialogue and textural richness. The central movements – the second pivoting between scherzo and intermezzo, the third an unaffected song without words – are the highlights, but the initial *Allegro moderato* has a telling understatement and the finale a cumulative momentum that carries all before it. It's another octet which marks its composer's coming of age.

- Oberton Octet (Ars Produktion)

3 Mature consolidation

Raff Octet in C, Op 176 (1872) Its composer may have had almost a decade of creativity before him, but the Octet is typical of Raff's later music in its formal clarity and expressive restraint. In his youth an acolyte of Liszt, Raff is here content to mine territory set out by Spohr and Mendelssohn half a century earlier. The deftness of its technique and unforced appeal of its content nevertheless ensures that this piece tempers its inherent nostalgia

with a thoughtful and appealing sincerity.

- Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble (Chandos, 3/90)

Bruch Octet in B flat,

Op posth (1920) Bruch largely abandoned chamber music after his formative years, returning near the end of his career for two string quintets and this octet – a double bass replacing the second cello and with one source titled 'Concerto' as to suggest larger forces were envisaged. Stylistically, the piece bids a fond if forthright farewell to the mid-Romanticism to which its composer

had adhered for more than six decades, its burnished sonorities leavening any regret with a suffused eloquence.

- Nash Ensemble (Hyperion, 5/17)

4 Conceptual equivalents**Shostakovich Two Pieces for string octet, Op 11** (1925)

The teenage Shostakovich here sets out his artistic intentions in unequivocal fashion. The two pieces were written during 1924-25, on either side of his seminal First Symphony. The Prelude fairly abounds in volatile emotion while the Scherzo exudes a coursing energy and caustic dissonance that points unerringly to the works following it. An intended fugue never progressed beyond sketches, but the work as it stands could hardly have been a more oblique centenary 'homage' to Mendelssohn's Octet.

- ROctet (Challenge Classics)

Milhaud Octet, Op 291 (1949) It was the chance gift of a manuscript book whose pages were lined with eight staves that led Milhaud to conceive of two string quartets combinable into an octet. Thus it is that the 14th and 15th of his 18 quartets can be played separately or together, each of the three movements a model of concision whose lucid formal design allows the composer's love of polytonal harmonies full rein. Such feats of technical know-how do not, though, prevent direct emotional engagement.

- Parisii Quartet and Manfred Quartet (Naïve, A/02)

5 Further adventures

Hersch Octet (2001) Recent string octets have often favoured homogeneous groups (all cellos, all violins or even all violas), but the Mendelssohn ensemble resurfaced in the Octet by Michael Hersch. Inspired by Georg Trakl's influential poem *Im Dorf*, its half-hour span takes in 11 movements lasting from 30 seconds to seven minutes and ranging from hushed introspection to fraught confrontation. This is gripping and provocative music from one of the most distinctive composers at work today.

- String Soloists of the Berlin Philharmonic (Vanguard Classics)

Available to stream at Apple Music



JW Childe's watercolour of Mendelssohn, 1829

Opera



Richard Wigmore on a Dutch Figaro that is both amusing and alarming:

'A beacon of sanity amid the mayhem, Christiane Karg's Susanna is both razor-sharp and long-suffering' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



Richard Osborne hears Rossini's rarely encountered *Moïse et Pharaon*:

'Key to the performance is the conducting – lithe, buoyant, nicely energised – of Fabrizio Maria Carminati' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**

Arnold

The Dancing Master

Eleanor Dennis *sop* Miranda
Catherine Carby *mez* Prue
Fiona Kimm *contr* Mrs Caution
Ed Lyon *ten* Gerard
Mark Wilde *ten* Monsieur
Graeme Broadbent *bass-bar* Diego
BBC Concert Orchestra / John Andrews
 Resonus © RES10269 (76' • DDD)
 Includes libretto



Here's a tonic for a melancholy year: a one-act comic opera by Malcolm Arnold,

unstaged in the composer's lifetime and never commercially recorded. And if the idea of Arnold as an opera composer comes as a surprise, you're not alone. Composed in 1952 to a libretto by the documentary-maker Joe Mendoza, and intended for television, *The Dancing Master* was rejected by both the BBC and Granada (too bawdy, apparently), and was promptly shelved by the composer. As the conductor John Andrews mentions in his booklet notes, it gets only the most fleeting of mentions in Meredith and Harris's standard biography of the composer (Thames Publishing).

Andrews and his collaborators make generous amends in this new recording of what turns out to be an absolute zinger of a score. It's based on a Restoration comedy by William Wycherley: a farcical tale of eloping lovers, scheming maids, pompous elders and false identities. Classic *opera buffa* material, in other words, and Arnold hits his stride from the first raucous orchestral guffaw. His pacing is very near flawless, and in fact he wrote the score – in barely two weeks – in the same headlong rush of creativity that produced his *English Dances*, the Second Symphony and no fewer than 11 film scores, including *The Sound Barrier*.

The result is a delight: exuberant but never breathless, passionate but unsentimental, orchestrated on a needlepoint and effortlessly melodic.

Arnold's moments of pastiche are wittily done: an awkward serenade evokes Beckmesser, and a whimsical melody accompanying a playful flirtation sounds unexpectedly familiar (he later recycled it as the main theme in *Hobson's Choice*). It all has that bracing, sophisticated freshness so typical of Arnold's music in the 1950s, and Andrews and the BBC Concert Orchestra sound like they're loving every bar: letting it be its own vivid, lively self.

That goes for the cast too, with Eleanor Dennis and Ed Lyon giving just enough opulence and warmth to the two young lovers, while handling Mendoza's tongue-twisting text with a clarity and poise that don't preclude genuine passion in Lyon's big romantic numbers, or a hint of real vulnerability in Dennis's moments of (happily illusory) heartbreak. Catherine Carby as the maid Prue, Fiona Kimm as a domineering aunt and Graeme Broadbent as the patriarch Diego enthusiastically deliver the requisite sensuality, bluster and bombast; and far more expressively and beautifully than these essentially comic roles strictly demand. Mark Wilde, as Monsieur, is little short of heroic in his ability to maintain a lyrical line while delivering Franglais straight out of 'Allo 'Allo.

In short, it's hard to imagine it done better. Arnold's many admirers should snap it up, as should anyone interested in 20th-century British opera. With luck, this recording will make a staging more likely. For now it raises one of post-war music's regrettable might-have-beens into a rewarding and very real 21st-century pleasure. **Richard Bratby**

Bononcini

Polifemo

João Fernandes *bass* Polifemo
Bruno De Sá *countertenor* Acis
Roberta Invernizzi *sop* Galatea
Helena Rasker *contr* Glaucus
Roberta Mameli *sop* Silla
Liliya Gaysina *sop* Circe
Maria Ladurner *sop* Venere
Ensemble 1700 / Dorothee Oberlinger

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © ② 19439 74380-2 (95' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Orangery, Sanssouci, Potsdam, Germany, June 15, 18 & 19, 2019
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



A temporary reduction of music-making at the Vienna court during the War of the

Spanish Succession prompted a group of its musicians led by Bononcini to visit Berlin as guests of Queen Sophie Charlotte – an intellectual polymath and talented musician. According to the eyewitness Telemann, in summer 1702 she played harpsichord in the first performances of Bononcini's new one-act opera *Polifemo* at her new palace, Lützenburg (posthumously renamed Charlottenburg). As well as several roles sung by aristocratic dilettantes, the all-star band included the Bononcini brothers, the theorist Conti and the string player and composer Ariosti – who regarded his own libretto as 'gallimaufry'.

The tale of Acis, Galatea and Polyphemus is jumbled up with another Ovidian legend of Glaucus's unrequited desire for the aloof nymph Scylla; the fisherman seeks help from the jealous sorceress Circe, whose trick potion transforms Scylla into an ugly monster; Venus intervenes to restore Scylla's beauty (on condition that she accepts Glaucus), and then shortly afterwards the goddess intervenes again to bring the murdered Acis back to life – no metamorphosis to a stream on this occasion, but a full-blown resurrection.

Dorothee Oberlinger and Ensemble 1700 deftly bring dramatic characters and situations to life in this live recording of a staged production in the Orangery at Sanssouci (the original theatre at Charlottenburg is long gone; Frederick the Great was Sophie Charlotte's grandson). There are a few momentary blemishes in balance and vocal tuning but there is plenty to admire about Bononcini's imagination and skill.



Depth of character: Hans Werner Henze's 1958 opera *Der Prinz von Homburg* receives an involving staging in Stuttgart – see review on page 80

Glaucus's naivety at Circe's deception is depicted in Helena Rasker's premature anticipation of amorous bliss. The sorceress's anticipation of cruel revenge is sung by Liliya Gaysina with gleeful jauntiness. One cannot help feeling sorry for Roberta Mameli's deceived Scylla as she yearns for immortality in the intimate 'Che più bramar potrò' (one of many continuo arias featuring obbligato cello), and her tearful lament upon the cruel metamorphosis into a monster ('Soccorete e non tardate', with oboe and bassoon). Maria Ladurner's blithe Venus puts things right in a little aria accompanied by lively cello figurations.

Acis and Galatea's mutual adoration is expressed sweetly in a chamber duet ('E cara la pena'). Acis's melancholic love song 'Partir vorrei' is sung tenderly by high countertenor Bruno De Sá; elsewhere, his dulcet upper range and florid agility are extraordinary. Galatea's feigned affection for Polyphemus ('Quanto penosallo, amore') exploits rustic droning bassoon and oboe, and her showpiece 'Cor contento fra catene' is sung brilliantly by Roberta Invernizzi (and features folk-like virtuosity from violinist Katya Grüttner). The volatile Cyclops is acted wittily by João Fernandes; his promise that he will give Galatea ten cows, eight calves, five pigs, more than two

hundred rams and four hundred geldings has lopsided exuberance ('Dieci vacche, otto viteli'). The murder of Acis, everyone's reactions and Venus's second intervention get short shrift – they all occur perfunctorily in a stretch of recitative followed directly by the final chorus, although a duet presenting Scylla and Glaucus's reactions to Acis's death has been cut. **David Vickers**

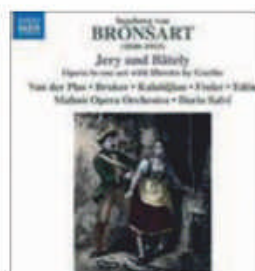
I von Bronsart

Jery und Bätely

Harrie van der Plas *ten* Jery
Caroline Bruker *sop* Bätely
Laurence Kalaidjian *bar* Thomas
Sönke Tams Freier *bass* Father
Thorsten Edén *treb* Boy
Ruxandra Voda van der Plas *contr* Voice
Malmö Opera Orchestra / Dario Salvi

Naxos © 8 660476 (67' • DDD)

Includes synopsis; German libretto available from **naxos.com**



Born in St Petersburg to Swedish parents in 1840, Ingeborg Lena Starck studied piano and composition, completing her studies with Franz Liszt, no less, in Weimar, where

she met pianist-composer Hans Bronsart von Schellendorff, whom she married in 1861. Her husband became general manager of the Royal Theatre in Hanover; but although this stemmed Ingeborg's concert appearances, her compositional activities continued, including a piano concerto and many songs. She composed four operas, of which the Singspiel *Jery und Bätely* was the second (1873).

It sets a libretto by Goethe, a bucolic farce about a Swiss milkmaid and an eligible bachelor (and cheesemaker), a plot set by some 27 composers between 1780 and 1909. The 19th century wasn't an auspicious time for female composers to be taken seriously as opera composers and Bronsart's own husband threatened her with divorce over her attempts to have *Jery und Bätely* staged.

Bronsart's score has echoes of early Weber or Mendelssohn – unsurprising given that the Singspiel form was already old hat by the early 19th century. The single act is split into 24 scenes with 15 musical numbers, none of them especially memorable. This Naxos disc features the forces of Malmö Opera under Dario Salvi, who play the score tidily. Light soprano Caroline Bruker is an attractive Bätely but Dutch tenor Harrie van der Plas is an undistinguished

Jery, strained at the top of his range. Laurence Kalaidjian sings a robust Thomas, soldier friend of Jery.

The miserly Naxos booklet only offers a brief synopsis of the opera. For an eight-page libretto you need to head to their website, where you'll discover that it's in German only. You get the feeling Naxos isn't exactly breaking much sweat persuading audiences to invest in exploring Bronsart's music, but given the opera is pretty thin gruel, I can't say I blame them.

Mark Pullinger

Cesti

La Dori

Francesca Ascioti *contr.*.....Dori (Ali)
Emőke Baráth *sop.*.....Tolomeo/Celinda
Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli *sop.*.....Arsinoe
Rupert Enticknap *counterten.*.....Oronte
Federico Sacchi *bass.*.....Artaxerse
Bradley Smith *ten.*.....Arsete
Alberto Allegrezza *ten.*.....Dirce
Pietro Di Bianco *bass-bar.*.....Erasto
Rocco Cavalluzzi *bass.*.....Golo
Konstantin Derri *counterten.*.....Bagoa
Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone
 CPO     CPO555 309-2 (161) • DDD
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



That Cesti's *La Dori* had such a varied performance history says something

about the changing tastes of 17th-century opera audiences. Premiered at the court theatre in Innsbruck, it then travelled to Florence, where it was spectacularly staged for a Medici wedding celebration. Then, having originated in the tradition of elite court opera, *La Dori* moved into the orbit of the Venetian public theatres. This marked the beginning of a remarkable success story, and in the following quarter of a century it was given at least 30 times, mostly in northern Italy.

In common with most 17th-century Italian operas, its text is unstable. As it moved from one house to another, *La Dori* was adapted according to the tastes of specific audiences and the abilities of individual singers. The prologue, often directed at local patrons, was frequently rewritten; no fewer than 14 versions, some with music by other composers including Stradella, are known. For the four different Venetian productions given in the space of just 10 years, recitatives were progressively shortened, new arias inserted and comic scenes given greater emphasis, no more so than in the music for the nurse Dirce (sung as in 'S'io son vecchia' with

mischievous relish by the tenor Alberto Allegrezza). Elsewhere the musical weight is concentrated in arias, elaborated into intense self-contained scenes. In episodes such as 'Speranze fermate' (here exquisitely shaped by Rupert Enticknap), with its beautifully crafted exchanges between voice and instruments, much of the emotional life of the opera is crystallised.

La Dori is rarely performed on the stage, largely because its convoluted plot, with its implausible twists of fate, mistaken identities and amorous confusions, makes the story so exhausting to follow. For this recording, Ottavio Dantone has sensibly based his edition on the Vienna manuscript, the most authoritative of the sources. It contains some of the finest operatic music to have been composed in the course of the entire 17th century, and Dantone and the Accademia Bizantina do it proud. Capitalising on the work's origins in a princely setting, they opt for a more expansive approach to instrumentation which takes them beyond the standard grouping of single strings and modest continuo forces that were standard in the Venetian theatres. In addition to adding more string players to give a total of five violins, two cellos and a violone, this involves a couple of recorders and a generous continuo ensemble including archlute, theorbo, chamber organ and harp (this latter somewhat implausibly). This more colourful palette acceptably enlivens the sparse contours of the score, and the ensemble's generally discreet approach (the sinfonias understandably excepted) to the application of improvised ornamentation, so often overdone by Baroque performers, is to be greatly welcomed. In all, a fine achievement.

Iain Fenlon

Henze

Der Prinz von Homburg

Štefan Margita *ten.*.....
Friedrich Wilhelm, Elector of Brandenburg
Helene Schneiderman *mez.*.....Electress
Vera-Lotte Böcker *sop.*....Princess Natalie of Orange
Robin Adams *bar.*.....
Friedrich Artur, Prince of Homburg
Moritz Kallenberg *ten.*.....Count Hohenzollern
Michael Ebbecke *bar.*.....Field Marshal Dörfling
Friedemann Röhlig *bass.*.....Colonel Kottwitz
Johannes Kammler *bar.*.....Sergeant
Orchestra of the Stuttgart State Opera / Cornelius Meister
 Stage director **Stephan Kimmig**
 Video director **Andy Sommer**
 Naxos   DVD 2 110668;   NBD0115V
 (114' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo • 0 • s)
 Recorded live, March 20 & 22, 2019
 Includes synopsis



Henze was 32 in 1958 when he wrote *Der Prinz von Homburg*, five years into his self-imposed Italian exile and casting

out demons still fresh in the memory: of detested militarism, of a longed-for but warily resisted reconciliation with the fatherland, of the struggle between personal agency and a necessary submission to authority and by extension tradition. These themes would have a lifelong impact on his music but were rarely again distilled with the potency of his response to Heinrich von Kleist's play of 1810 and its cunning compression by his librettist Ingeborg Bachmann.

The real-life Prince was a successful if impulsive cavalry leader for Frederick the Great but Kleist remodelled him as a dashing and dangerous dreamer, sentenced to death for insubordination. His leader offers him a way out: if he can find it in his heart and head to call his sentence unjust, he will be released. By submitting to the dictates of conscience and coming to terms with the prospect of a just death, he wins respect, pardon and his life – but at what cost?

Bachmann and Henze stripped out or suppressed much of the still-latent nationalism in Kleist's play, and director Stephan Kimmig follows suit, understandably so: a stage set bristling with Prussian uniforms would likely put off Stuttgart Opera patrons rather more than the dingy tiled white space furnished by Katja Hass's design (reminiscent of Keith Warner's Royal Opera settings for both *Wozzeck* and Mime's den in *Das Rheingold*).

Chronologically open-ended between the period of the opera's composition and the present day, signifying a place for experimentation, exercise and brutality, set and costumes put up the idea of the Elector as a ballet-master (Prussian soldiery apparently used ballet as a military discipline): an apt and playful one for a composer who took pains to assert his place within the canon while tugging away from its conventions. The opera's dedication to Stravinsky is confident enough to acknowledge in plain sight dramatic debts to the distanced but real emotions of *The Rake's Progress* and musical ones to everything from *Dumbarton Oaks* to *Agon*.

On film, we see plenty of the excellent orchestra and Cornelius Meister's incisive direction during the several interludes. The balance between stage and pit comes and goes, but this is a more serious defect of the

audio-only production on *Capriccio* which appears to derive from the same source (minus final applause). Without the benefit of pictures, it would be hard to credit Štefan Margita's youthful-sounding Heldentenor as the source of the Elector's authority. Opposite him, the Prince is beautifully pitched by Robin Adams as a Schumann-like character, torn between Florestan and Eusebius, who has wandered in from singing *Dichterliebe*. His love interest, largely invented by Bachmann, is Princess Natalie, a high lyric soprano part sung with crystalline control by Vera-Lotte Böcker. In her duets with the Prince and the Elector Henze's inspiration rises highest, and this staging rises with him: like few post-war composers he could write opera for characters who change over the course of a couple of hours, who know themselves better at the end of it, and we are changed a little for knowing them. **Peter Quantrill**

Lehár

Cloclo

Sieglinde Feldhofer *sop* Cloclo Mustache
Gerd Vogel *bar* Severin Cornichon
Susanna Hirschler *contr* Melousine
Ricardo Frenzel Baudisch *ten* Chablis
Daniel Jenz *ten* Maxime de la Vallé
Matthias Störmer *bar* Petipouf
Frank Voss *spkr* Narrator
Chorus of the Lehár Festival, Bad Ischl;
Franz Lehár Orchestra / Marius Burkert
 CPO © ② CPO777 708-2 (120' • DDD)
 Recorded live, August 9-11, 2019
 Includes synopsis



We already know Mlle Cloclo – or do we? Along with Lolo, Margot, Froufrou and the rest, isn't she one of the grisettes that so delighted Danilo at Chez Maxim's in *The Merry Widow*? The relationship, if any,

is never made clear, but the heroine of this 1924 operetta is also a Parisian showgirl with an eye to the main chance. She even has a sweetheart called Maxime.

The similarities end there. We're not in Pontevedro any more: there are saxophones in Lehár's score and *Cloclo* inhabits an altogether more cynical (if scarcely less silly) world than that of the *Widow*. Our heroine happily sees a friend imprisoned in her place while she passes herself off as the illegitimate daughter of her sugar-daddy Severin Cornichon, and even manages to ingratiate herself with his wife Melousine. If the whole cheerfully amoral set-up comes across as slightly brittle: well, it was actually quite a success in its day, with Viennese critics seeing it as a welcome return to a more throwaway, frivolous kind of operetta.

Posterity hasn't treated it so kindly and from a modern perspective it definitely feels like a transitional work – as Lehár tries to find his voice in a post-1918 world of foxtrots and film stars. *Cloclo* is more sprightly than sentimental, although here and there – a glittering celesta accompaniment; the glowing prelude to Act 3 – there are hints of his next major hit, *Paganini*. Taken on its own terms, there's much to enjoy, including an expansive Act 2 finale, as well as a delightful piano-lesson duet decades before *The Music Man*, all presented with a winningly light touch and Lehár's customary deluxe orchestration.

This live performance from 2019 has all the qualities – positive and less positive – that we've come to expect from CPO's visits to the Lehár Festival Bad Ischl. Apart from some unfocused choral singing and occasional rhythmically inept bursts of audience participation, you wouldn't guess that it was taken from a live performance, although the spoken dialogue is stiff. I was more bothered (though no longer surprised) by the absence of any printed libretto, and non-German-speaking listeners will struggle to match the music

to the sketchy synopsis provided (I fell back on Mark Lubbock's *The Complete Book of Light Opera*).

Against that, the cast are a thoroughly likeable team. Sieglinde Feldhofer (*Cloclo*) and her two suitors Gerd Vogel (*Severin*) and Daniel Jenz (*Maxime*) all have flexible, pleasantly transparent voices with a tart, occasionally plangent edge that actually proves something of an asset in material as sweet as this. Feldhofer can soar when she needs to; she blends surprisingly well with Jenz in their brief love duets, and also with Susanna Hirschler as Melousine – who brings a satisfying musicality to what is essentially a character role. But the set's strongest single asset is the stylish, effortlessly lively conducting of Bad Ischl regular Marius Burkert, and the understated but classy playing of the festival orchestra. I can imagine *Cloclo* being revived with more opulence, but ultimately she's a showgirl – and with Burkert in the pit, she's always light on her feet.

Richard Bratby

Mozart

Le nozze di Figaro

Alex Esposito *bass-bar* Figaro
Christiane Karg *sop* Susanna
Stéphane Degout *bar* Count Almaviva
Eleonora Buratto *sop* Countess Almaviva
Marianne Crebassa *mez* Cherubino
Katharine Goeldner *mez* Marcellina
Umberto Chiummo *bass* Bartolo
Krystian Adam *ten* Don Basilio
Jeroen de Vaal *ten* Don Curzio
Matteo Peirone *bass* Antonio
Louise Kemény *sop* Barbarina
Chorus of Dutch National Opera; Netherlands Chamber Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
 Stage director **David Bösch**
 Video director **Misjel Vermeiren**
 ArtHaus Musik © ② DVD 109 393; © Blu-ray 109 394
 (3H' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.0 & PCM stereo • O • s)
 Recorded live 2016



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Andrea Marcon, Artistic Director





Updating *Figaro* is always likely to minimise the class tensions that underlie this most humane and (potentially) poignant of musical comedies. In David Bösch's Dutch National Opera production, the opera is a sexual battleground set in a crazily dysfunctional household, with an ever-present threat of violence. During the opening sequence Patrick Bannwart's revolving set successively reveals the Countess collapsing in an alcoholic stupor, the Count in vest and tracksuit bottoms working out on his exercise bike, and Cherubino flouncing sulkily in his 21st-century teenager's bedroom. Empty bottles and glasses are strewn everywhere, with a distraught-looking Susanna trying to clear up the mess. The whole Almaviva establishment exudes a heavy-drinking, past-caring decay. Pink-clad servants in powdered wigs disorientatingly evoke the opera's original setting. But rococo-pretty this is not.

There are some good visual gags, as when Cherubino scampers around the room hidden inside a cardboard box, or when Susanna coolly presses her remote to open the wardrobe. The theatrical pacing is sharp, the characters' interaction lively and detailed. This, though, is a *Figaro* as likely to make you squirm as smile. Violence first flares up when Susanna and Marcellina attempt serious damage with a hot iron. Figaro, resorting to his former trade, sadistically shaves Cherubino's head as he sings 'Non più andrai', then joins with the Count in roughing the boy up. Several times the Count threateningly brandishes a rifle or an axe. At the end of Act 2 the Countess seizes the axe and lunges at the Count. Predictably, Mozart and da Ponte's final vision of harmony and reconciliation, set here amid a half-wrecked wedding reception, is anything but.

Urged on by Ivor Bolton's brisk, no-nonsense direction, the singers throw themselves wholeheartedly into Bösch's conception. All are camera-friendly and act with their faces as well as their voices. A beacon of sanity amid the mayhem, Christiane Karg's Susanna is both razor-sharp (as any Susanna must be) and long-suffering, frustrated with Figaro, repelled – even if she can conceal it – by the loutish Count. It's typical of the production that her tender 'Deh vieni non tardar' is undermined by Figaro's threats of strangulation – comic dislocation or a betrayal of a moment of exquisite stillness,

according to taste. Alex Esposito's handsomely sung Figaro is highly strung, always two steps behind his fiancée: a would-be cool dude who pours out his disillusionment in a bitterly incisive 'Aprite un po' quegl'occhi'.

Once over that initial encounter with the bottle, Eleonora Buratto makes a more or less sympathetic Countess, essentially lonely, caught up in a destructive love-loathe relationship with her husband. Generous of voice and phrasing, she excels in the Countess's two solos, softening her bright, vibrant tone in the reprise of 'Dove sono', and gracefully ornamenting the melodic line. Stéphane Degout's charismatically sung Count, at once seedy, dangerous and absurd, dominates the stage whenever he appears. His 'vengeance' aria, during which he contemptuously pours champagne over a cowering servant, is a vocal and histrionic tour de force.

Although her Italian can be vague, Marianne Crebassa, with her gleaming mezzo, plays the confused, gangling adolescent to the life, skulking around in a woollen cap before morphing into a bleached-blond punk. The Marcellina and the dry-toned Bartolo are vocally so-so; but like Krystian Adam's camp, pink-suited Basilio and Louise Kemény's beautifully sung Barbarina, they fit naturally into Bösch's conception. As in most productions, Marcellina's and Basilio's Act 4 arias are omitted. Ivor Bolton finely controls the mounting tension of the big ensembles, though more than once his tempos sound too rigidly held, starving the singers of expressive space. You'll look in vain here for moments of dreamlike radiance. But the conducting is of a piece with a production that rattles along entertainingly enough, sometimes amuses, sometimes alarms, but never moves. Which in *Figaro* can't be quite right.

Richard Wigmore

Rossini

Moïse et Pharaon (1827 Paris version)

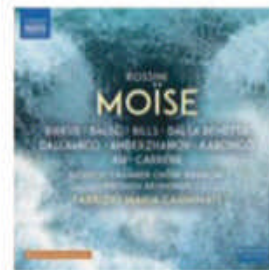
Alexey Birkus *bass* Moïse
Luca Dall'Amico *bass* Pharaon
Randall Bills *ten* Aménophis
Patrick Kabongo *ten* Éliézer
Baurzhan Anderzhanov *bass* Oziride
Xiang Xu *ten* Ophide
Silvia Dalla Benetta *sop.* Sinaïde
Elisa Balbo *sop.* Anaï
Albane Carrère *mez.* Marie

Górecki Chamber Choir, Kraków; Virtuosi Brunensis / Fabrizio Maria Carminati

Naxos ® ③ 8 660473/5 (168' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 19, 25 & 28, 2018

French libretto available from naxos.com



This latest release from the annual Rossini festival in Wildbad in southern

Germany is one of its more successful, and one of its most important. The wait has been a long one for a recommendable recording of the original 1827 Paris version of *Moïse et Pharaon*, Rossini's grand opera remake of *Mosè in Egitto*, the Lenten *azione tragico-sacra* he completed in Naples in 1819. The Paris revision held the stage down the years, albeit as *Mosè*, a bastardised Italian version that Rossini neither worked on nor forbade. It was this that Tullio Serafin famously recorded in Naples in 1957 (Philips, 12/57) with Nicola Rossi-Lemeni as a less than adequate Moses.

I first encountered the authentic *Moïse et Pharaon* in a 1976 French radio recording released on three Voce LPs. These boasted a largely French-speaking cast conducted by the vastly experienced John Matheson. The first widely available CD version was made during the 1997 Pesaro Festival. Graham Vick's staging, played in a vast sports hall, found little favour. Worse, such merits as the performance possessed were wiped out by the festival's disastrous go-it-alone attempt to record the production live in this acoustically difficult venue (Rossini Opera Festival Foundation, 2/00).

Only one member of the 2018 Wildbad cast, the excellent Congolese tenor Patrick Kabongo, has first-rate French. Still, it's a generally strong ensemble that acquits itself well, a ponderously sung Pharaoh the sole blemish. Key to the performance's success is the conducting – lithe, buoyant, nicely energised – of Fabrizio Maria Carminati. This, along with Naxos's commissioning of yet another academically sourced booklet essay that tells us next to nothing about the opera, enables us to sit back and enjoy the music without being too concerned about the whys and wherefores of Paris's Cecil B de Mille-like theatrical makeover.

The performance uses the 1827 Troupenas edition, a text that's as unproblematic as that of Rossini's other Paris revision, *Le siège de Corinthe*, is not. The only textual point concerns the revised end, where Jehovah appears before the grateful Israelites in a roseate glow after the waters of the Red Sea have closed over the pursuing Egyptians. The hymn of thanksgiving that followed this was cut before the first night and omitted from the printed score. Wildbad also omitted it, though it's been recorded separately for the current set – a welcome footnote had



Some good visual gags: Dutch National Opera stages an updated *Le nozze di Figaro* in a modern and dysfunctional household

the decision not been taken to try to edit it into the live performance before the final applause.

Still, as Albany says at the end of *King Lear*, that's but a trifle here. For the time being, the set fills a not-so-small hole in the Rossini discography. **Richard Osborne**

Vivaldi

Il Tamerlano (*Il Bajazet*)

Bruno Taddia *bar* Bajazet

Arianna Vendittelli *sop* Idaspe

Filippo Mineccia *counterten* Tamerlano

Marina De Liso *sop* Andronico

Sophie Rennert *mez* Irene

Delphine Galou *contr* Asteria

Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone

Naïve (M) (3) OP7080 (156' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Vivaldi's *pasticcio* was commissioned by Verona's Accademia Filarmonico for their

recently built theatre during the 1734-35 Carnival. The manuscript score (now in Turin) is titled *Il Bajazet*, whereas the Verona libretto was published as *Il Tamerlano*. The Sinfonia and many arias were recycled from the Red Priest's own operas, the recitatives were composed afresh, and eight numbers are by

Giacomelli, Hasse, Broschi and Porpora. Nevertheless, the Turin source has five lacunae that are filled in here by musicologist Bernardo Ticci, whose solutions are different from those devised by Fabio Biondi (for Virgin) and Erin Helyard (Pinchgut Opera). Naïve lists the sources of all the music after the track-listing; it takes quite a bit of disentangling, but Reinhard Strohm's concise essay is expertly lucid.

Accademia Bizantina play crisply in the Sinfonia, and Ottavio Dantone nurtures versatile textures in the diverse arias. Filippo Mineccia's quick precision characterises Tamerlano's imperious authority ('In sì torbida procella'); the tyrant's attempt to woo his prisoner Asteria ('Vedeste mai sul prato') is sung unevenly but the countertenor excels in haughty disdain at the disguised Irene's criticisms of his infidelity ('Cruda sorte, avverso fato') and spiteful revenge on discovering that Andronico and Asteria are lovers ('Barbaro traditor').

Delphine Galou's fluency and soulfulness are well-suited to Asteria's emotional conflict between personal and political relationships: her scorn for Andronico's protestations is dramatised vividly in 'Stringi le mia catene'; the climax of the opera is Asteria's seething report of her father's suicide and her own venomous fury hurled at Tamerlano ('Svena, uccidi, abbatti, atterra', which Vivaldi

might have interpolated into a production of *Tamerlano* in Milan in 1727). Andronico's predicament caught between a rock and a hard place is characterised sympathetically by Marina De Liso: the siciliano 'Quel ciglio vezzosetto' and the limpid 'Non ho nel sen costanza' are shaded gracefully, and De Liso sings superbly in the trippingly elegant 'La sorte mia spietata' and heroic 'Spesso tra vaghe rose'.

Bruno Taddia's over-aspirated coloratura in Bajazet's arias is less persuasive than his scathing condemnation of Asteria's agreement to marry their captor Tamerlano ('Dov'è la figlia?') and his brief angst-ridden exit to commit suicide entirely offstage. Tamerlano's jilted bride Irene is performed feistily by Sophie Rennert, whose searing melismatic singing is at the forefront of the valorous 'Qual guerriero in campo armato'; her tense lament 'Sposa son disprezzata' is laced with icy determination, and the celebration of her reclaiming Tamerlano's promise of marriage features delightful pastoral recorders that represent a loyal turtle dove ('Son tortorella'). Arianna Vendittelli's virtuoso singing is dazzling in 'Anch'il mar par che sommerga'. Accademia Bizantina's immersive interpretation is a compelling advocacy for the patchwork opera's merits. **David Vickers**

Comparative versions (Bajazet):

Biondi (5/05^R) (VIRG/ERAT) 456459-2

Helyard (PINC) PG007



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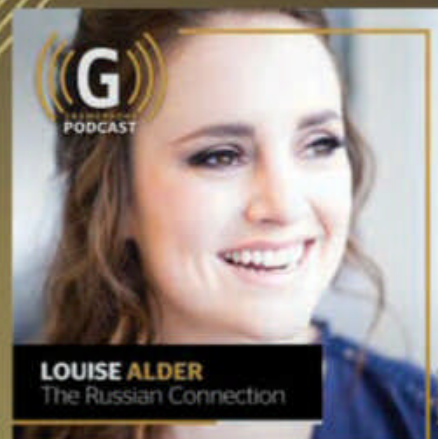
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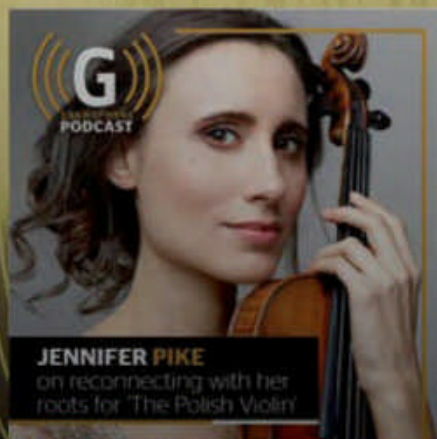
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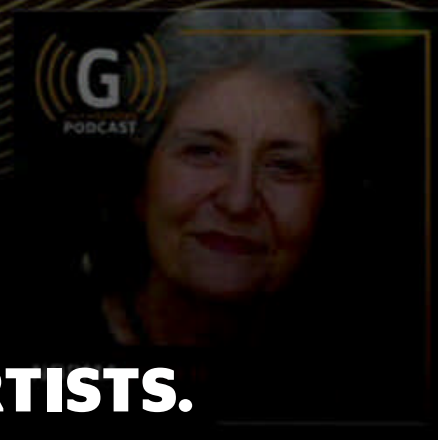
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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah

Axiom

Ropeadope Records © RAD600



An album that's in hindsight a watershed moment because of its recording date. The multi-award-winning trumpeter

Christian Scott and his septet's new release *Axiom* was recorded 'live' in mid-March literally on the eve of New York City's lockdown. It's a selection of original material from a weekly residency, and the last concert, at the time of writing, to be held in the Blue Note club. A New Orleans native, Scott has bands with outsize atmospherics, a power punch more suited to stadiums than jazz clubs. It can sound a little excessive: too bombastic or alternatively brooding at certain points, but the ensemble on *Axiom* has an excitingly turbo-charged

rhythmic fervour: an ecstatically percussive backline merging influences from Latin rock, flamenco, New Orleans funk, R&B, and African music among others, with Corey Fonville's right in-the-pocket post-hip-hop contemporary beats.

Selwyn Harris

Various Artists

Blue Note Re:imagined

Blue Note © 003228902



Blue Note Re:imagined shines a light on the fertile British scene and connects it to the tradition by inviting 15 of the UK's

most talked-about artists to rework classic tunes from the label's back catalogue. The results are as wide-ranging and genre-fluid as you'd expect. Some are subtle, such as Shabaka Hutchings's interpretation of

Bobby Hutcherson and Harold Land's shadowy, abstract mood piece 'Prints Tie'. Hutchings has tweaked the instrumentation (clarinet instead of sax, guitar and electronics rather than synths) but the atmosphere remains the same, capturing the haunting beauty of the original. Elsewhere there are more radical departures and some clever ideas. Nubya Garcia directly addresses the brief with her version of Joe Henderson's 'A Shade Of Jade' by juxtaposing swing sections, mixed to sound like a sample of the original, with a contemporary back-beat feel.

Not all of the tracks on *Blue Note Re:imagined* are winners and there are some notable absences (no SEED Ensemble, Sarathy Korwar, Moses Boyd, Nérija or Maisha), but it's an enjoyable selection that puts these artists in context – celebrating their roots in the tradition and their fizzing creativity. **Thomas Rees**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Rodrigo Costa Félix

Tempo

Fado World ©



It's eight years since the release of Costa Félix's last disc. Admittedly, his previous album, *Fados de Amor*, was a hard act to

follow. But patience is rewarded, and this is another outstanding disc for fado aficionados. Things get off to a deliciously melancholic start, with 'A Sangue Frío' – a perfect conversation between voice and guitar (played here by Pedro Jóia). It's beautifully balanced, subtle, full of invention but never showy or losing touch with the emotional core of the track. Other guest instrumentalists on the album include Jon Luz on ukulele on the jaunty 'Lisboa é Assim' and Tiago Machado on piano in 'Obscura Sina', which has a feel of café

chanson about it. Unquestionably, though, the great strength of the album lies in the extraordinary ensemble work between voice and guitar in tracks such as 'Enganos', or 'Redondilha' with its brisk wit. The album's resident line-up of instrumentalists comprises Henrique Leitão on Portuguese guitar, Miguel Ramos on classical guitar and Paulo Paz on double bass. **Michael Macaroon**

Redi Hasa

The Stolen Cello

Ponderosa Music © 872295



When Redi Hasa arrived in Italy as a refugee from Albania, the only possession he took with him was his cello, liberated from the conservatoire in Tirana where he had been a student. His virtuosity on the instrument brought him to the attention of

the composer Ludovico Einaudi, with whom he has recorded and toured now for several years. On his solo debut he coaxes from his instrument an extraordinary sound, deep and resonant, in which he seems to make the cello sing with the soul and passion of a human voice. It surely cannot be long before someone dubs him 'the Jimi Hendrix of the cello'. Yet his playing is entirely acoustic and without trickery or treatment.

The compositions draw on Mediterranean folk tradition and conservatoire classicism, sometimes meditative, as on 'The Snow' and 'Butterfly', and at other times playful, as on 'Little Street Football Made of Socks'. Collaborators include Turkey's Mercan Dede and Akin Sevgör, the German composer Alva Noto and Hasa's mentor Einaudi. Someone should send a copy to the Kronos Quartet so David Harrington can get on the phone to Italy with a commission. **Nigel Williamson**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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No tone un-Sterned

Rob Cowan considers the recorded legacy of one of America's great violinists, Isaac Stern

Although loquacious, Isaac Stern didn't indulge in small talk, either as a man or as a musician. Whether performing Bach, Beethoven or Bartók, Pleyel, Prokofiev or Penderecki, all that really mattered was the musical material to hand, which he treated to the chaste tone, muscular attack, intense but never over-sweet vibrato and interpretative intelligence that he applied to everything he played. A good place to start in the context of this comprehensive and musically compelling collection is disc 9, which opens to Kreisler's *Schön Rosmarin* and Dvořák's *Slavonic Dance* Op 46 No 2 in Kreisler's arrangement, good playing if relatively charmless. Although a great violinist, I'd say that in general Stern was no Heifetz, Kreisler or Perlman when it came to condensing the expressive essentials of his style for the sake of violin trinkets. He was invariably at his best in music that had scale and a certain level of ambition. Then again, for Franz Waxman's tempestuous *Tristan und Isolde* Fantasy (from the film *Humoresque*) – Wagner's four-hour music drama as a 10-minute storm in a teacup – Stern gives his all.

Stern's great forte was his energy, both as a player and as a 'mover and shaker'

Disc 9 soon shifts from tender and happy-go-lucky tunefulness to the profounder realms of mystery, most specifically with Szymanowski's 'Chant de Roxane' and 'La fontaine d'Arethuse', where we're transported to an entirely different plane, the former in particular opening to a quiet, muted line, as pure as it's affecting, then onwards to Falla's *Suite populaire espagnole* (as arranged by Paul Kochanski), where Stern's mastery of colour is brought to the fore, and lastly Hindemith's C major Violin Sonata (1939), Stern territory from start to finish,

dry as dust in the hands of some but not in his. A pity, though, that he never recorded Szymanowski's two concertos, the First especially.

At this early stage it's worth drawing attention to the mastery of pianist Alexander Zakin, no mere accompanist but a compelling musician whose contribution to even the slightest morceau bears witness to a genuine musical partnership. Sonatas by Bach, Bartók, Beethoven (No 7), Bloch, Brahms, Enescu, Franck (two recordings), Mozart and Prokofiev testify to just how musically potent this well-matched duo was. Needless to say, there are various duplicate recordings of different works, with no general rule as to which might prove superior, Stern captured in relative youth or Stern in late maturity.

Take Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, K364, of which there are four versions in all. The first (1951) from Perpignan has Stern partnering viola player William Primrose with Pablo Casals conducting, the outer movements steadily paced but rhythmically forceful, the *Andante* a prayerful 14'11", surely one of the slowest on disc. And while a 1971 recording with Pinchas Zukerman and the ECO under Daniel Barenboim ups the tempo in the same *Andante* by roughly a minute, a tendency to drag means that it actually sounds slower. I rather prefer a 1980 live recording with Zukerman and Zubin Mehta conducting (part of Stern's 'Sixtieth Anniversary' concert), but perhaps the best of the four has Stern himself directing the LSO in 1966 with viola player Walter Trampler, the violin-viola partnership watertight, the playing style rigorously classical. Other Mozart highlights include all five violin concertos, the E flat Divertimento (1973, with Zukerman and Leonard Rose) and an especially memorable 1957 account of the E flat Piano Quartet with Eugene Istomin, Milton Katims and Mischa Schneider.

Various Bach concertos include three versions of the Double in D minor (with

Alexander Schneider, Yehudi Menuhin and Itzhak Perlman respectively), the two solo concertos, four times in the case of the A minor, and two versions of the Concerto for oboe and violin, the first, from 1950, featuring oboist Marcel Tabuteau and conducted by Casals, with a central movement that stretches to near-on eight minutes – daring, it's true, but it doesn't quite come off. I once asked Stern why he had never recorded any of Bach's unaccompanied works for violin (although he did play them in recital); he merely shrugged, 'I suppose I've never got round to it'.

There are two recordings of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, under Bernstein in 1959 and Barenboim in 1975, both recorded with the New York Philharmonic, the Bernstein version featuring an especially rapt slow movement. In the case of the Brahms Violin Concerto, three versions will likely divide opinion. On the first (1951), with the RPO under Thomas Beecham, Stern occasionally comes across as cavalier, while there are times when Beecham sounds as if he's merely going through the motions (a Sibelius Concerto with the same forces is better). A 1978 recording with Mehta conducting the New York Philharmonic has many lovely moments but surely the best of the three is from 1959, where Stern is partnered by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy, always a successful combination, Ormandy as ever proving himself an imposing Brahmsian. Even more impressive is the Philadelphia Brahms Double Concerto with Leonard Rose (1964, coupled with a handsome Stern-Rose-Istomin Beethoven Triple), the close of the *Andante* unforgettably poignant. A New York alternative under Bruno Walter from 10 years earlier, although musical, has less of an impact and is in any case hampered by hollow, edgy sound.

The Brahms jewel of the set is one of many featured chamber-music recordings – always a genre worth relishing in Stern’s sympathetic hands: the String Quintet Op 111, recorded (as I recall) while burning the night oil in 1952 at the Église Saint-Pierre, Prades, with Alexander Schneider, Milton Katims, Milton Thomas and Paul Tortelier, who lunges at the opening like a devil possessed, the effect as uplifting as the start of the Third Symphony. No later recording of this extraordinary work is on quite the same level. The Schumann Piano Quintet coupling (with Myra Hess), although not as exultant as the Brahms, is extremely fine. Hess is at her considerable best in the First Piano Trio (also 1952) with Casals, which is marginally broader in its pacing than the 1966 Stern-Rose-Istomin version (part of their admirable integral set of the trios), Hess’s playing cast very much in the grand manner, Casals more the meditative bard than Leonard Rose, who draws from his instrument a darker, more intensely vibrant line. Other closely – and very stereophonically – recorded Stern-Rose-Istomin classics include trios by Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn, the Schubert Second Trio in particular magnificently appreciative of the work’s lyrical if austere mood, while other unmissable Prades productions from 1952 include Brahms’s First Sextet and a much-loved and musically persuasive version of the Schubert String Quintet where my only criticism is that the cellists (Casals and Tortelier, no less) are rather backwardly balanced.

Bartók’s concertos find Stern an energetic scrapper with a strongly beating heart. In terms of mood and overall approach he more than meets his match in the Second Concerto with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, who also join him for the brazenly folkish Rhapsodies, the second both exotic and angry. As to the First Violin Concerto (a premiere commercial recording from 1961), Ormandy and his Philadelphians offer alert support; and if Stern sometimes strays from the note’s centre in the *Allegro giocoso* second movement (he very occasionally evades spot-on intonation throughout the set), he perfectly captures the violent vicissitudes in mood that are so typical of youthful infatuation, which is what brought the piece to life in the first place. That same combination of toughness, warmth and emotional candour informs gripping accounts of concertos by Barber, Berg and Bernstein (the premiere recording of the *Serenade (after Plato’s Symposium)*, all under Bernstein’s



To mark the centenary of Isaac Stern’s birth in July, Sony Classical revisits his complete CBS analogue catalogue

authoritative direction, Stravinsky (with the composer himself conducting), the two Prokofiev concertos (preferably under Ormandy, which are also superbly recorded) and Copland’s Sonata with the composer at the piano.

Other works featured in winning performances include familiar concertos and concertante works by Lalo, Mendelssohn, Ravel, Saint-Saëns, Sarasate, Tchaikovsky and Wieniawski, some recorded more than once, and a pair of large-scale modern concertos (modern at the time of recording, that is), both commissioned on Stern’s behalf, from Penderecki (1978, under Stanisław Skrowaczewski) and George Rochberg (1977, under André Previn and heavily cut), the former – the First, though here called simply Violin Concerto – straddling a no man’s land between retreating modernism and upcoming romanticism, the latter a study in stylistically opposing forces and featuring several cadenzas. Neither would be on my shortlist of favoured post-millennial concertos for the instrument but Stern was certainly game in tackling them and both works are very well conducted. (Premiere recordings of concertos by Henri Dutilleux and Peter Maxwell Davies would only qualify for a Stern ‘Digital Edition’.)

The final question, with all these riches and more on offer, has to be: how does Isaac Stern match up to the best of his

peers? I’m thinking of players such as Heifetz, who could express more in a single phrase than many could manage for an entire concerto; the brilliant and ever-suave Nathan Milstein; the urbane and intelligent David Oistrakh, who for the present context vigorously partners Stern in various Vivaldi concertos; Arthur Grumiaux, whose mantra seemed to be ‘less is more’; the deeply humanist Yehudi Menuhin; or such eminent masters of the bow as luscious-sounding Aaron Rosand, Leonid Kogan, Henryk Szeryng, Christian Ferras and so forth. I’d say that Stern’s great forte was his colossal energy, both as a player and as a ‘mover and shaker’ (of which much is written in the excellent book that accompanies the collection). There was virtually nothing overtly seductive about his approach but his sincerity, his mastery of the instrument and his determination to employ it for the noblest musical ends marked him out as an exceptional artist, eminently worth celebrating, which is precisely what Sony Classical has done with this truly wonderful centenary analogue set (selling for about £240), virtually all of it skilfully mastered. 🎻

THE RECORDINGS

The Complete Columbia Analogue Recordings Isaac Stern

Sony Classical © (75 discs) 19439 72427-2

A Salzburg centenary

Peter Quantrill welcomes two sets celebrating the festival's first hundred years

When in 1911 Hugo von Hofmannsthal drew on medieval English morality plays to write *Jedermann* (subtitled *The Play about the Death of the Rich Man*), he had a cosmopolitan Berlin audience in mind. Nine years later, the play's revival on the steps of Salzburg Cathedral, a provocative choice of work and venue to inaugurate an artistic festival, aroused a storm of anti-Semitic protest from local newspapers. Hofmannsthal and the director Max Reinhardt were held responsible for 'the falsification of German art through Jewish dilettantes'.

A century on, *Jedermann* has become, with Mozart's C minor Mass, as much an annual fixture as 'Rule, Britannia!' at the Proms. Tucked away almost as an appendix, a 1958 studio recording led by Will Quadflieg is one of the rarity-value attractions (even without English translation) to DG's centenary-tribute box. Another is the belated attention accorded to the festival's Mozartian *spiritus rector* from its earliest days, Bernhard Paumgartner. Both a musically illustrated autobiography and a pair of albums – arias with Maria Stader and mid-period symphonies with the Mozarteum Orchestra which he directed for decades, all previously unissued on CD – bear witness to a far more durable fusion of scholarship and lively direction than the cut-about text that disfigured Ferenc Fricsay's 1961 *Idomeneo*.

The spine of the box has been transplanted almost complete from the 25-CD set issued a decade ago to mark half a century since the inauguration of the Festspielhaus. That, too, had its share of novelties, notably a headstrong early *Ein Heldenleben* from Zubin Mehta and the fierce beauties of Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* in a 1992 Abbado production hitherto only available on VHS. Much here may be (all too) familiar – Karajan presiding over caramel-textured Mozart symphonies and suffocatingly heavy Tchaikovsky and Wagner with Mutter and Jessye Norman – but the array of operas has been valuably expanded to include compare-and-contrast *Rosenkavalier*

performances from both Karajan (1960, on fire from the first bar) and Böhm (1969, touched with a sly wit, ultimately as touching as any on disc thanks to Ludwig's Feldmarschallin and Troyanos as Octavian).

Any collector who previously overlooked DG's Böhm/Strauss series (*Arabella*, *Ariadne*, *Die schweigsame Frau*, all high-definitive) and notable Karajan productions from the late '50s, culminating in a barn-burning 1962 *Trovatore* with Bastianini, Price and Corelli, will not want to miss out second time around. The Orfeo label may be best placed to produce a truly comprehensive history of the festival on record but Richard Osborne's essay for DG further enhances a more-than-useful compilation.

Must-see/can't-watch, hide-behind-the-sofa viewing that belies the festival's reputation for conservatism

In September 1998 André Tubeuf concluded a *Gramophone* collection of Salzburg-based opera recordings, heavily weighted towards the 'golden age' 1930s and '40s, with the opinion that almost none of the festival's stagings in recent memory had been worth preservation. I wonder if he would say the same – I hope not – about the new C Major collection of filmed productions from the past 12 years.

Almost all of them have been separately reviewed – and praised – in these pages, and it seems otiose to revisit and echo those judgements. I will say, though, in tentative reappraisal, that I thoroughly enjoyed the burlesque elements of the

Magic Flute directed by Lydia Steier; that the opulent medieval naturalism of Peter Stein's design for *Fierrabras* failed to overcome an inherent lack of dramaturgical thinking on the part of Schubert and his librettist; and that I found myself captivated by the cool distance as well as the enchantment of Harry Kupfer's *Rosenkavalier* and Franz Welser-

Möst's conducting, which recaptures some of the old Böhm magic in the score.

Welser-Möst is proving himself a considerable Straussian at Salzburg. He is on incandescent form in *Salome*, summoning diaphanous textures from the VPO that make a perfect foil for the voluptuous alienation of Asmik Grigorian in Romeo Castellucci's staging. Few operas would appear less Covid-friendly than its companion-piece *Elektra* and yet the vast Festspielhaus stage accommodated it within an abbreviated 2020 festival, lead soprano and conductor now teaming up with director Krzysztof Warlikowski: must-see/can't-watch, hide-behind-the-sofa viewing (hopefully scheduled for future release) that entirely belies the festival's now-obsolete reputation for theatrical conservatism.

The other opera mounted this year was *Così fan tutte*, as much a landmark piece in the festival's history as *Der Rosenkavalier*, and directed by another unlikely Salzburg renegade, Christof Loy. His 2009 staging of Handel's *Theodora* in the C Major box I find almost unbearably true to life at points, based, like his 2011 Salzburg *Frau ohne Schatten*, on the strong basic concept of the human dynamics involved in putting the piece on in the first place. In *Theodora*, the Jansons/Neuenfels *Queen of Spades* and Salonen/Marthaler *Makropulos Case* there is the most compelling evidence that the spirit of Reinhardt and Hofmannsthal prospers in Salzburg once again. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

100 Years of the Salzburg Festival

DG © (58 discs) 483 8722

Salzburg Festival 100 Anniversary Edition

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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan dips into two Beethoven quartet cycles and revisits a legendary Russian group

Quatuor Ébène's celebratory 'Beethoven Around the World' shares the repertoire's greatest string quartets between seven international venues in Philadelphia, Vienna, Tokyo, São Paulo, Melbourne, Nairobi and Paris. But such is the skill of producer, engineer, mixing and mastering whizz Fabrice Planchat that you'd hardly guess that more than one venue was involved. On all seven discs the sound is strikingly immediate, the burr of freshly applied rosin adding edge to every lacerating note and the placement of each instrument precisely focused. Only Op 59 Nos 1 and 2 are sequentially programmed, the rest being a mix of early, middle and late masterpieces. Op 130 is a highlight, not only because following the Cavatina with the rude awakening of the *Grosse Fuge* makes perfect musical sense (though Beethoven's lighter finale rewrite is omitted), but because Quatuor Ébène play the long first-movement exposition repeat. The three 'Rasumovskys' are blustery, full-on affairs, with rapt slow movements and much targeted virtuosity elsewhere; ditto the *Harp*, especially the rocket-charged Scherzo.

The Op 18 quartets are cannily interpreted, each to its own, whether the *opera buffa*-style opening of No 6, the vivid 'late' premonitions in No 5 or the restlessness of No 4. And there's the beguiling smile that opens No 3, the work's gently swirling finale a happy prelude to the greatest performance of all, Op 132, its *Molto adagio* an extremely expansive 21'00" (the wonderful Busch rested content at 19'39", the affecting Elias at 20'02"). But tempo is not the real issue here, more what happens between the movement's opening and closing bars, the meditative passages played with selectively applied vibrato, the slight increase in tempo when Beethoven switches to 'recovery mode' (*Neue Kraft fühlend* – 'feeling new strength') faster though not so swift as to risk a relapse. The first disc might prove the best place to start, principally because it features striking performances of key works at both ends of the spectrum, Op 18 No 1 and Op 131, the respective first movements – one pensive, the other infinitely mysterious – spelling the expressive range of the whole series. What we have here is a profoundly life-enhancing traversal of a major musical journey captured in state-of-the-art sound. The recordings were made live and in



rehearsal but there's next to no evidence of an audience and no distracting applause to contend with.

Then there's Supraphon's reissue of the **Smetana Quartet's** beautifully engineered cycle for the Japanese Nippon Columbia label – its first release outside of Japan, in fact – recorded between 1976 and 1985, a vade mecum of subtle asides (try Op 59 No 1's minutely shaded second movement), again with the *Grosse Fuge* serving as Op 130's finale and the same quartet's long first-movement repeat intact. The late quartets included here are not to be confused with the Smetana's 1960s recordings of the same works (see *Replay*, 10/06), where there are some major differences tempo-wise and Op 130's repeat

This is a profoundly life-enhancing traversal of a major musical journey in state-of-the-art sound

isn't observed (though the *Grosse Fuge* still serves to conclude the work). Here we also have Beethoven's own quartet transcription of his Piano Sonata Op 14 No 1, perceptively performed, as is everything else in the set. If you find Quatuor Ébène just a little too immediate and full-on, then the Smetana's blend of poise and passion should prove ideal (though the *Harp's Presto* is a virtuoso tour de force).

Another welcome reissue gathers together the digital recordings of Russian repertoire that the **Borodin Quartet** (the Kopelman-Abramenkov-Shebalin-Berlinsky line-up) made for the Warner Classics group between 1990 and 1995, including a disc of miniatures, the complete run of Tchaikovsky quartets plus *Souvenir de Florence* (with Yuri Yurov on viola and Mikhail Milman on cello), a Schnittke disc (including his take on Mahler's Piano Quartet with pianist Ludmilla Berlinsky) as well as works by Shostakovich – the

Piano Quintet and Second Piano Trio with Elisabeth Leonskaja, and Quartets Nos 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 12 and 15. At this stage of the game the quartet still echoed the mantra of their one-time leader Rostislav Dubinsky, who always claimed that the first violinist should serve as a sort of conductor whose word is the bond for the whole quartet. The 'golden age' line-up with second violinist Yaroslav Alexandrov stayed together for 20 years. Indeed, I saw them perform what was in the late 1960s the 'complete' cycle of 11 quartets and their immaculate pooled tone was as remarkable in concert as it was on disc. Mikhail Kopelman's leadership seems to me the last audible vestige of Dubinsky's performing philosophy.

While preparing this column I chanced upon the Borodin's latest (2014-18) survey of the quartets, recorded in Moscow for Decca, with members Aharonian-Lomovsky-Naidin-Balshin, their approach marginally more open and relaxed than that of their predecessors though still capable of sounding stunned or savage. Most noticeable now is that the canon appears to have settled somewhere beyond the older Borodins' ownership, being no longer 'their' quartets but simply great 20th-century chamber music that's up for grabs. True, the Fitzwilliam, Brodsky and Emerson Quartets had also contributed to this act of interpretative liberation but with the evolving Borodin Quartet you can hear the music gradually take on more varied hues. Decca's excellent set also includes the Piano Quintet with Alexei Volodin and various shorter works. I enjoyed it hugely. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Beethoven Cpte Stg Qts Ébène Qt

Erato (M) 7 9029 53398-1

Beethoven Cpte Stg Qts Smetana Qt

Supraphon (M) 7 SU4283-2

Various Cpsrs Russian Chamber Music

Borodin Quartet et al

Warner Classics (S) (B) 9029 52046-3

Shostakovich Cpte Stg Qts Borodin Qt et al

Decca (S) 7 483 4159

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Reiner in Pittsburgh

Some years ago, RCA/Sony Classical gathered together 'The Complete RCA Album Collection' featuring the Chicago Symphony under the Hungarian-American conductor Fritz Reiner (2/14), a set that is currently fetching exorbitant prices online. Sony should surely reinstate this valuable collection, adding various other Reiner recordings from their stable, not necessarily with the CSO; but as for now this (mostly) Pittsburgh Symphony release – which includes a thrilling Met recording of *Salome*'s finale scene recorded by Ljuba Welitsch, the sexiest *Salome* on disc – is a significant supplement to the earlier set.

The 'light music' high point is Rodgers's *Carousel Waltz*, both thrilling and refined

Reiner led the PSO for the decade from 1938 to 1948 and his recordings with them chronicle familiar Reiner attributes such as dynamic projection, fierce attack, lightning tempos, tight ensemble, immaculate balancing, often surprising levels of delicacy, goal-orientated interpretations and a sure grasp of musical structure, qualities he shared with his younger compatriot George Szell. On the other hand, although there are times you can almost 'hear the fear' (Reiner was a ruthless taskmaster), no one could claim that at this stage of the game the Pittsburgh SO's playing matched up to standards that William Steinberg later achieved with the orchestra for Capitol, or the greater sophistication that Reiner himself brought to his Chicago band or that characterised Szell's work in Cleveland, though the Pittsburgh orchestra's current maestro, Manfred Honeck, is doing a pretty impressive job levelling up to the best efforts of his fêted forebears.

To deal with some of the 'non-Pittsburgh' recordings first, Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* with the Columbia String Ensemble dispatch one or two interpretative surprises, such as a Third Concerto where the first movement is

fairly emphatic and the second light as a feather, with detached notes that fly past at speed. Throughout the cycle Reiner achieves impressive internal clarity, more so than a 1947 Pittsburgh recording of the Second Orchestral Suite (with flautist Sebastian Caratelli), not to be confused with Reiner's RCA complete set of the Suites from a few years later (currently out on Pristine Classical), which is in general superior. These *Brandenburgs* are perfectly listenable – the soloists are excellent and the overall approach is what one might call traditional by the standards of the day – but they're no match for, say, Busch or Casals.

By contrast, Reiner's Mozart is keenly driven, appropriately so in the first movement of No 40, which rivals Wilhelm Furtwängler in Vienna for intensity. The *Haffner* lacks repose but generates plenty of energy and Beethoven's Second Symphony features a furious *Allegro con brio* that makes us long for the missing repeat. On the tail of Beethoven's Second Symphony comes a swirling, vividly atmospheric *Night on the Bare Mountain*, which in turn gives way to Robert Russell Bennett's *Porgy and Bess: A Symphonic Picture* (a Reiner commission), a strange beast that seems to reach a very definite conclusion at 20'40" then suddenly switches to 'It ain't necessarily so' as a sort of add-on, almost as if Bennett had initially forgotten to include it. The 'light music' high point is Rodgers's *Carousel Waltz*, which is surely given its finest-ever recorded performance, at once both thrilling and refined.

Reiner's Pittsburgh recordings of music by Richard Strauss have already reappeared in the context of 'Reiner Conducts Richard Strauss' (Sony 88883 79055-2). *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* is interesting in that it features two movements – 'Menuett des Lully' and 'Courante' – that Reiner didn't include when he re-recorded the suite in Chicago. Although lively enough, this 1946 rendition is more rough-hewn than the more elegant CSO remake, which is far better played, especially 'Das Diner', where what I presume is János Starker's seductive lead cello is clearly audible. The Pittsburgh *Don Quixote*, on the other hand, is jam-

packed full of character, whether biting, lyrical or touched by gentle humour, and it is blessed by memorable solo playing from cellist Gregor Piatigorsky and violinist Henri Temianka. In this case I'd rate the Pittsburgh recording more highly than the Chicago remake, whereas for *Ein Heldenleben* I'd double back to Chicago, and in the case of *Don Juan* Reiner's first Chicago recording and this mono Pittsburgh predecessor are pretty much on a par for breathless excitement. As to the 'other' Strauss, Johann junior, three waltzes push for maximum visceral impact, as do Ravel's *La valse*, Debussy's 'Ibéria' and various other shorter pieces. A Wagner programme features an excellent Venusberg Music as well as orchestral snippets from *The Ring* and the disc's highlights, the Overture and a 'three-piece suite' from *Die Meistersinger*. Eight Brahms *Hungarian Dances* are given highly charged readings and Reiner seems to share Rudolf Serkin's decidedly heroic view of the composer's First Piano Concerto.

Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra includes a 'Giuoco delle coppie' that is fractionally faster than on the 1956 Chicago recording; and although Sony's otherwise excellent annotator Kenneth Morgan leads us to expect the work's rarely heard 'original ending', what we actually hear is the revised ending. Kodály's *Dances of Galánta* is full of flair, while Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony contrasts desolation in the opening *Largo* with high spirits in the finale. Among other works included are Honegger's Prokofiev-like Concertino for piano and orchestra, where Oscar Levant is supported by Reiner with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, and pieces by Weiner, Tchaikovsky and Kabalevsky, as well as Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and Falla's *El Amor brujo*, vibrantly sung by Carol Brice. The transfers are extremely clean.

THE RECORDINGS



The Complete Columbia Album Collection Fritz Reiner
Sony Classical © 14
19075 93677-2



Fritz Reiner's Pittsburgh partnership forms the basis of a new Sony Classical set

Slatkin senior

I was delighted to see the prodigiously gifted vintage violinist-conductor-arranger Felix Slatkin (Leonard's father) celebrated on a recent Scribendum set of vividly engineered Capitol recordings, many having previously been reissued on single CDs from the Warner stable. Most feature the Concert Arts and Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestras (Slatkin had founded the former himself), with all manner of repertoire included, from the *Rawhide* theme (and others like it) to the music of Delius, most notably the rarely heard *Caprice and Elegy* with Slatkin's wife and a founding member of the Hollywood String Quartet cellist Eleanor Aller as soloist. In fact, my wife, who isn't normally given to commenting on what she hears coming from my listening room, reacted to the *Irmelin* Prelude with the words: 'This is a masterclass in tonal subtlety.'

So true – quality string-playing hitting the spot throughout the wide-ranging collection, whether in popular classics, bigger works such as the *Grand Canyon Suite*, the *Caucasian Sketches* and a dazzling *Gaîté parisienne*, tone poems, waltzes, highly amusing send-ups of the classics (with the 'Fantastic Strings') and dances

or violin virtuoso showpieces with violinist Michael Rabin. As with Scribendum's Carmen Dragon collection (7/20) it features the sort of heartfelt playing you might expect to hear on a Hollywood soundtrack of the period. So if you fancy crossing the light/serious music divide in style, this is another ideal bridge to use.

I'm reliably informed there's enough Slatkin material left over for a small supplementary volume at the very least, so here's hoping that Scribendum (or some other label) will oblige. The transfers are excellent but, as almost always with Scribendum, there is no documentation, so a visit to a dedicated website such as thompsonian.info/slatkin.html may be in order.

THE RECORDING



The Art of Felix Slatkin
Scribendum © 13 SC822

Uplifting Mahler

While Slatkin and his players stimulate the senses, the conductor Hans Rosbaud takes a more cerebral approach, as is fitting

for most of the repertoire that he and his orchestras chose to perform. Latest to appear in SWR's invaluable Rosbaud series is a Mahler box consisting of Symphonies Nos 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 as well as *Das Lied von der Erde*. Although these recordings have been available in earlier incarnations this is, to the best of my knowledge, the first box dedicated entirely to the complete run of Rosbaud's Mahler repertoire as preserved on tape.

Symphony No 4 and *Das Lied* are with the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, the rest with the SWF Orchestra, Baden-Baden. The Fourth is especially effective, the *Poco adagio* simplicity itself, Rosbaud allowing its tender narrative to unfold without impediment. He has the first movement ebb and flow according to the dictates of mood and harmonic colour, much as he does in the Sixth, where the first movement's second subject is lovingly handled, the Scherzo darker, more insinuating than is the norm, with a deafening gong-stroke near the end (12'14"). The finale is very much the sum of its parts, never piecemeal or lapsing into hysterical overstatement, the movement's opening *sostenuto* nightmarish – especially before the march theme takes over.

In the Fifth, the second movement truly moves 'stormily, with the greatest vehemence' as prescribed, while the deeply expressive *Adagietto* is a sensibly paced 8'53". The Ninth's first movement is informed by a great sense of urgency (23'00" is swift by any standards), the collapsing climax from 15'00" as devastating as on any other recording. Rosbaud is especially effective in the argumentative 'Rondo-Burleske', though he blends his string choirs most beautifully at the start of the *Adagio*. The Seventh's provocative stream of consciousness suits Rosbaud's recreative temperament, while *Das Lied* finds the wonderful Ernst Haefliger in fresher voice than on his three commercial recordings. Grace Hoffman may not have the distinctive timbre of Kathleen Ferrier or Janet Baker but she nonetheless sings with genuine depth of feeling.

Above all, Hans Rosbaud's Mahler is durable. He never allows the music to tire or exhaust you. My musical instincts tell me that this would have been Mahler's own preferred way with his music. The transfers are in general first-rate. **G**

THE RECORDING



Mahler Symphonies. *Das Lied*
Sols; SWF Orch, Baden-Baden;
Cologne RSO / Rosbaud
SWR Classic © 8
SWR19099CD

Classics RECONSIDERED



David Gutman and Peter Quantrill discuss whether Previn's 1971 recording of Vaughan Williams's Symphony No 5 with the LSO has stood the test of time



Vaughan Williams

Symphony No 5

LSO / André Previn

RCA

Obvious comparisons with Boult's symphony cycle become more fascinating in this work where the composer's Englishness stands uncompromising. Both conductors are right in presenting the music without apology, but where Boult takes one idiomatically down the Cotswold lanes of music, demonstrating the gentle beauty with a sparing gesture here or there, Previn's way is more concentrated, more intense, even purer. Both readings, not to mention Barbirolli's, are each superb in their way, but I have a feeling that Previn's is going to prove the most exportable of the three. I would recommend it to anyone not yet quite convinced of Vaughan Williams's genius, for with Previn, generally using slower tempi than his older colleagues, the

scale and concentration go together. This is not just local English music, but a work universal in the way that Bruckner's symphonies are. Control of tension lies at the heart of Previn's approach to this music. It is not just a question of slowish tempi held together firmly, but of the building of climaxes. If at the start he is not so mysterious as Boult, it is partly because he has opted for clarity of texture. There is consistent refinement particularly in the string writing which in my experience has never before sounded so diaphanous. Within a couple of pages it is clear how masterfully Previn is controlling the dynamics, shading the long crescendos (and diminuendos) towards greater extremes than his rivals. It is in the slow movement where he scores clearly over them. In the second movement his slowish tempo is close to Boult's and both cunningly spring the rhythm to

compensate, with the cross-rhythms characteristically crisp from Previn, almost jazzy. Similarly in the finale a relaxed tempo goes with fine rhythmic control, and high contrasts of texture as well as of dynamic between the sections of the Passacaglia. If Previn does not always sound idiomatic, it is partly that Boult as well as Barbirolli tend to use a more plastic style in some of the characteristic Vaughan Williams melodies with their three-against-two hemiolas. Previn compensates in his simplicity, in the extra richness of the LSO string tone, recorded superbly. My own feeling is that this is an intensely refreshing new view. Maybe the emotional power of the slow movement will be too much for some, but Previn's handling of extremes has nothing false about it. His approach is fundamentally straight and direct. Above all this is music from the heart. **Edward Greenfield** (3/72)

David Gutman I got to know this extraordinary work through Sir Adrian Boult's stereo remake (HMV, 4/70) but, as for so many of my generation, it was André Previn's interpretation that gripped the imagination. That it never let go perhaps reflects the fact that it was always there – the conductor returned to the piece often, twice more on disc and regularly for London concert audiences until January 2011. The original LP version has rarely been out of the catalogue. But as Sir Simon Rattle's recent BBC Prom with the LSO reminds us (if we need reminding), this is not the only way to go. The discographical hinterland is very different now. Then it was Boult or Sir John Barbirolli, neither trumping their first thoughts (except sonically). Now we've everything from Sir Roger Norrington to Bernard Haitink!

Peter Quantrill As you say, few readings since Previn's – save perhaps Andrew Manze's? (Onyx, 4/18) – enjoy the same extensive experience of having made the piece work in concert. I wonder if that's a key factor. By the time of the sessions in May 1971, conductor and orchestra had almost completed their VW cycle for RCA as well as taking the Fifth on a US tour in the spring and then reprising it in London just before going into the studio. At that point, Joan Chissell (*The Times*) declared it the 'most benign' of the symphonies. So you might think, listening to Boult; though the glassy tone of the LPO strings in the symphony's unfolding paragraphs is at odds with his quite placid articulation – not entirely immune here and elsewhere from the 'vegetative quietude' deprecated by Wilfrid Mellers in *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (1989). Previn believed

in the Fifth as 'a passionate pilgrimage', and that's what I hear in this recording.

DG If so, it's a rather slo-mo sort of trip. I love it to bits, but I'm not sure I hear the cut and thrust of symphonic argument so much as a preoccupation with continuous, extreme beauty of sound. I'd choose a different Mellers quotation, where he describes the Fifth as a 'quest that *attains* its goal'.

PQ Previn himself talked about encountering VW's music as a student through the Fourth Symphony, and I think his recordings present Nos 4 and 5 as a complementary, ambivalent pair rather than a study in black and white – in that sense like Beethoven, Sibelius and Shostakovich at the same stage in their symphonic careers, and to a degree only exceeded by the composer's own performances as they have come down to us.



Digging deep into the score: André Previn in rehearsal with his London Symphony Orchestra in the 1970s

DG I'm not sure I would agree. Like Shostakovich, Vaughan Williams could be a brusque interpreter of his own music, and while the results in the Fourth were tremendous, the live Fifth from 1952 (Somm, 4/08) is not in the same league. The Passacaglia works, but doesn't its epilogue feel too short? Whereas what I hear from Previn there moves me profoundly. This is something more than sentimentality and it's very hard to define. There's certainly no religiosity (I think the John Bunyan connections can be oversold), rather a reverence for what the score has meant to audiences at times of turmoil, whether personal or political. And taking us to the threshold of Paradise will mean, I'm afraid, departing from the letter of the score. There's quite a lot of that in this performance.

PQ In my experience no one rivals VW himself in departing from the score – composer's licence! – at points such as the mighty, affirmative *rit* at the climax of the first movement. But where he and Previn seem most similar to each other is in the edgy, glinting detail of the Scherzo: VW at his most Holstian.

DG Barbirolli in 1944 (HMV, 5/44) took a more headstrong approach than either. At the risk of sounding cynical, I'd guess that VW might just be playing safe with his more central course. Previn takes the Scherzo slower still because he wants his winds to bounce their rhythms in a 'jazzier' way while drawing attention to the superior definition of the LSO strings. Incidentally, it's now thought the timpani should enter

three (not two) bars before fig 10 in the Romanza, so that makes Previn – like the composer himself – one bar out, the apparent victim of a copyist's error.

PQ Perhaps I'm interpreting from hindsight or foreknowledge when I hear Previn's Romanza springing from the same well as his LSO recordings of Rachmaninov and Shostakovich, especially in the hymnlike writing for strings (Previn's RPO remake – Telarc, 5/89 – overcooks the latent romanticism here). I love the crisp attack on the chorale-like statement of the theme by the winds (2'43"), the Sibelian tug of the string reply and the fretful, Mahlerian bird chorus presaging the spiritual crisis at the movement's heart. At all these points, Previn isn't departing from the score so much as opening it out – but perhaps you had other instances in mind?

DG I'm not going to censure a performance which has moved me to tears more than any other, but it is indubitably slower and smoother than the composer intended, even if (as Roy Douglas inferred) he had no understanding of metronomes. Rallentandos tend to arrive early and leave late or not at all. Curiously, I hear the RPO version as straighter and the 1995 Curtis Institute version (EMI) as the glitziest of the three. If we're talking about the Romanza, Rattle is not alone in finding a tougher, more mobile anguish in that dramatic middle section. And Previn's almost trance-like approach is even more marked in the opening movement, where his reading may still be the most unhurried of all. Not that I hear it as remotely bland.

PQ I got to know the Fifth through Haitink's recording (EMI, 12/95), and at the time it elicited the kind of rapture you describe. Now I hear Previn digging much deeper into the score, especially the final Passacaglia, with the kind of time-travelling, imaginative rigour that belongs to any fine Brahms Fourth, before the *Tranquillo* invitation to the coda ushers in the kind of all-embracing retrospective that it shares with the fulfilment of *A German Requiem* in Previn's hands.

DG On a narrower topic, I worry that digital remastering has leant a generalised gleam to a Kingsway Hall (London) original made by Decca's best sound engineers. The legendary Kenneth Wilkinson was apparently involved. How do you feel it all stands up? Those amazing *pianissimos* were real enough in the hall.

PQ Without the LP for reference I'm reluctant to pass judgement ... and anyway, doesn't the perspective suit your take on the mutually assured serenity of both the symphony and Previn's reading of it?

DG Perhaps. One can understand why Edward Greenfield was wowed in his original *Gramophone* review (cut quite drastically here), confident that perceptions of VW might now change, banishing those 'Cotswold lanes' for something 'purer', more 'exportable', more 'universal'. I like that image, although it is only recently, in the run-up to Covid-19, that Vaughan Williams the symphonist had seemed finally to be re-entering the mainstream of concert life. Our own Shostakovich?

PQ 'May we take it that the object of all art is to obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties – of that in fact which is spiritual?' In this rhetorical question posed by VW, I hear the expression of the Fifth, noting the 'partial' as much as the 'spiritual'. And in a 1974 profile of Previn, Greenfield was surely right to disavow lazy assumptions about the conductor 'Americanising' the LSO. We English listeners often approach 'foreign' takes on 'our' music with a curious scepticism, as we might a cocktail of uncertain ingredients. It can be hard for us to acknowledge how directly and universally the music speaks beyond our borders. If Previn achieves that (and I think he does), then the recording more than deserves its classic status.

DG Previn had his own prejudices but he plainly adored this music! **G**

Books



Patrick Rucker peruses a volume of essays on the virtuoso Liszt:

'These interesting avenues of investigation navigate between music's object status (the work) and event status (the performance)'



Hugo Shirley reads about the history and performance of German song:

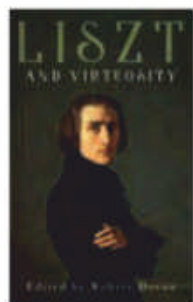
'We are presented with a fascinating extended cast list of those who played roles in shaping the genre and its reception'

Liszt and Virtuosity

Edited by Robert Doran

University of Rochester Press, HB, 446pp, £95

ISBN 978-1-580-46939-5



For a sampling of the veritable explosion of Liszt studies in the wake of the centenary of the composer's death in 1986, one need look no further than the Eastman Studies in Music from the University of Rochester. Since 2011 the series has published four book-length studies on Liszt, of which the most recent, *Liszt and Virtuosity*, has just appeared. This volume contains 11 substantial essays by international scholars that derive from a symposium held at the Eastman School of Music in March 2017. From a multivalent cultural-historical perspective, *Liszt and Virtuosity* lays out a number of interesting new avenues of investigation, navigating between music's object status (the work) and event status (the performance).

As the editor Robert Doran writes in his introduction: 'Perhaps no canonical composer has been more maligned than Liszt for indulging in the sins of virtuosity. This has probably been the greatest impediment to Liszt's acceptance as a "great composer" in the traditional sense.' The very topic of virtuosity as an object of musicological consideration was broached by the outstanding British scholar Jim Samson in his 2003 *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt*. Fittingly, Samson's essay here explores the problems of assessing virtuosity before the age of recording in light of his recent ethnomusicological researches into oral traditions.

Doran's own essay draws a distinction between the 'brilliant style' typified by Kalkbrenner, Herz, Dreyschock, Henselt, Thalberg and others, and the evolving 'bravura style' forged by Liszt. The piano's continuing evolution during the composer's long life is the focus of Olivia Sham, who

provides a generalised overview, from the light Viennese action instruments of Liszt's youth through the iron-framed Chickering and Steinways of his old age.

Nicolas Dufetel sheds light on the intellectual and practical underpinning of Liszt's idea of virtuosity during the formative early 1830s through a close reading of three of his draftbooks – one held in Weimar, another in Washington and a third in private hands, previously unexamined in detail. These are considered in juxtaposition with the extensive diary entries made by Caroline Boissier during the piano lessons her daughter took with Liszt.

Alternative readings, or *ossia* (a variant of the Italian *o sia* – 'or be it' or 'it may be'), are scattered throughout Liszt's music, often appearing in smaller print, above and parallel to the main text. In the past, these have been cited as an indicator of Liszt's creative indecision, a failure somehow of the composer to make up his mind. In a thorough and thoughtful essay, Jonathan Kregor examines these alternative texts *in toto* within the vast terrain of Liszt's piano music. Ranging in purpose from addressing keyboard compass, via easier or more difficult possibilities of execution, to textural or harmonic recasting of the material, Liszt's *ossia* demonstrate his faith in the performer as the ultimate arbiter of the musical experience.

The book concludes with Shay Loya's focus on virtuosity in Liszt's late music. Some of these works, in their ascetic minimalism, eschew virtuosity altogether, while others nostalgically recall florid procedures from the 1840s. Yet a third category, including works such as the *Csárdás macabre*, poses entirely new challenges, inviting us to ponder the origins and implications of Liszt's rich, varied and possibly deliberately provocative late style.

Interspersed are contributions by Ralph P Locke on experimental works by Marie Jaëll, Debussy and Liszt; David Keep on Liszt and Brahms; Jonathan Dunsby on the transcription of Schubert's *Wanderer*

Fantasy as a concerto; Dolores Pesce on the two Cypress pieces of the third book of *Années de pèlerinage*; and Kenneth Hamilton on musical antecedents to a number of Liszt works.

As a whole, *Liszt and Virtuosity* illustrates that for almost any view of the long 19th century, whether considering the specifics of musical Romanticism or the broader realm of artistic endeavour and dissemination, the long and varied career of Liszt is bound to yield valuable insights.

Patrick Rucker

German Song Onstage

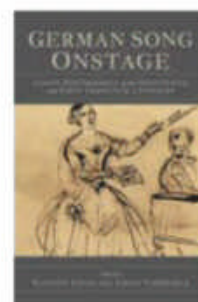
Edited by Natasha Loges and Laura Tunbridge

Indiana University Press, 302pp,

HB, £66, PB, £25.99

ISBN 978-0-253-04700-7 (HB);

978-0-253-04701-4 (PB)



'A singer in evening dress, a grand piano. A modest-sized audience, mostly well-dressed and silver-haired, equipped with translation booklets. A programme consisting entirely of songs by one or two composers.' Laura Tunbridge's introduction to *German Song Onstage* begins with a concise description of what the lieder recital tends to be today. But why, she goes on to ask, is this so? And why should the once-standard ways of programming and performing lieder – picking and choosing from cycles; mixing and matching song, solo and chamber and even orchestral works – seem so incompatible with today's reverent attitude to the genre?

The essays that make up the volume don't necessarily answer those questions but they certainly underline the need to ask them, the need to question why today's attitudes are what they are. Growing out of a 2016 conference held jointly at the Royal College of Music and Wigmore Hall – that highest of high temples of song performance – they represent a varied



Liszt's development of piano technique as both composer and performer is examined in a new book of essays

selection that covers a broad geographical and historical range. Apart from a longer, slightly rambling opening essay by Susan Youens, the keynote speaker at the conference, they are all around the 20-page mark. Some chapters, admittedly, reflect the book's proposed aim better than others, but they are all fascinating vignettes examining specific lieder-related phenomena, particular singers or particular places.

Together they help us build up a picture not only of how the genre started to be performed on its own but also, and perhaps most interestingly, how it began to inhabit its discrete aesthetic realm as a vocal form that shared some of the prestige of 'absolute' genres without the dubiousness –

both moral and aesthetic – of other vocal genres (primarily, of course, opera). The expected names are there. We've the baritone Julius Stockhausen, the first singer to perform complete cycles in public, but who, as Natasha Loges notes, did so as an act more of experimentation than consolidation. The spirit and influence of Brahms weighs heavy throughout, as does that of the Schumanns, Benjamin Binder exploring their attempts early on to separate song from other genres and to establish the norms for its performance: respectful, 'authentic' and unsullied by stage tricks or cheap effects.

But we are also presented with a fascinating extended cast list of others who played roles in shaping the genre and its

reception, a large number of them women whose importance has previously been either underplayed or entirely ignored. Rosamund Cole's chapter explores how the great soprano Lilli Lehmann, for example, turned increasingly to lieder after a vocal crisis in 1892, her celebrity helping to cement the genre's status. Another chapter explores the role played by Amalie Joachim – née Schneeweiss, married to Joseph from 1863 to 1884 – in devising programmes and publications that underlined the lied's deep-rooted heritage.

Other chapters include a fascinating exploration of Nikolay Medtner's engagement with Goethe within the context of Russian Germanophilia; an examination of different English translations of Schubert's 'Erlkönig' and Brahms's *Liebeslieder-Walzer*; and an account of how, with special focus on Bechstein Hall in London (later, of course, Wigmore Hall), the lied extricated itself from mixed programmes to climb to its current lofty position in the musical hierarchy.

A look at attempts to incorporate lieder into the educational programmes presented to workers' societies in turn-of-the-century Berlin is especially fascinating, also showing how little, in many ways, has changed. 'Though there had long been concerns that an evening exclusively consisting of art music ... would not be met with sufficient interest,' wrote an official who organised an evening out for his craftsman's society in 1914, 'the choice and order of the pieces and the artistically masterful, gripping performances ... refuted all previous concerns.'

This quotation ties in well with what, in some ways, is a bonus chapter: the volume concludes with selection of insights and concerns the two editors have gathered together from interviews with some of today's top song performers. These both underline entrenched views and reflect pragmatic concerns – regarding audience attention, programming and the need for variety – similar to those of many performers and promoters in the long 19th century. They touch briefly, too, on the role recordings have played in forming habits and expectations: a subject that is obviously beyond the scope of the volume but which clearly deserves further examination.

As it stands, though, this is a rewarding book. It offers a patchwork rather than a full picture, but is brimful with extensively referenced research, telling observations and fascinating titbits. In sum: well worth exploring for anyone interested in the history of lieder and its performance.

Hugo Shirley

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Borodin's String Quartet No 2

The Russian chemist-composer's Second String Quartet was one of his happiest creations.

Andrew Farach-Colton sifts through the available recordings of this Russian masterpiece

Borodin composed his Second String Quartet during the summer of 1881 while vacationing at a dacha outside Moscow. That he wrote it in a matter of months is an anomaly, as composition nearly always took a back seat to his successful career as a research chemist. Thus it took him five years to complete his First String Quartet, seven for his Second Symphony and, even after nearly two decades, he never came close to leaving *Prince Igor* in a performable state.

So while the Second Quartet is very much an exception, it's also notably less ambitious than its predecessor. Where the earlier work is expansively structured and emotionally wide-ranging, the latter is Haydnesque in its concision and strikingly circumscribed in mood. Still, even before the 1953 Broadway musical *Kismet* took two of its tunes and transformed them into hit songs – 'Baubles, bangles and beads' (from the Scherzo) and 'And this is my beloved' (from the Notturmo) – the Second has always been the more popular. Dedicated to Borodin's wife, Ekaterina, it was reportedly intended to evoke the idyllic days of their courtship, and the fragrant air of romance it exudes is part of its enduring allure.

Given its astonishing melodic richness, one might think this is the kind of work that simply 'plays itself'. But there's a catch, of course, one that David Lloyd-Jones articulates succinctly in his overview of the composer's output for the 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary*: 'The Quartet's narrow emotional range, its Romantic languor and the pervading blandness of its textures run the danger of being considered cloying, yet Borodin avoids this by virtue of the music's latent muscularity.'

Of the 60-odd recordings I auditioned for this survey, only a minority reveal this essential musculature; most seem content merely to revel in the work's luxurious,

sugar-coated surface. Mind you, there are worse things than wallowing in such an enchanting score, and a few performances manage to indulge so winsomely that as a listener one can't help but let pure pleasure take over. That said, it's not asceticism that Borodin requires here; and if the performers follow the directives in the score – paying particular attention to the metronome markings – any impression of flabbiness or undue excess can be avoided. To this point it bears noting that the Second Quartet wasn't published until 1888, some six years after the first performances, by which time Borodin had heard a variety of interpretations, so presumably his metronome markings give a fair indication not only of his intentions but also their practicability.

In fact, most ensembles hew close to the suggested tempos for the central Scherzo (excepting the 'Baubles, bangles and beads' section, which is almost always indulged at a more leisurely pace than dotted $\text{minim}=60$, even in those recordings that pre-date *Kismet*) and Notturmo movements. Far fewer take the $\text{minim}=84$ marking for the opening *Allegro moderato* seriously (emphasising the *moderato* very much at the *Allegro's* expense) and, paradoxically, most race through the finale's *Vivace* at a tempo some 20 or more notches faster than the recommended $\text{minim}=108$.

PIONEERS OF ALL STRIPES

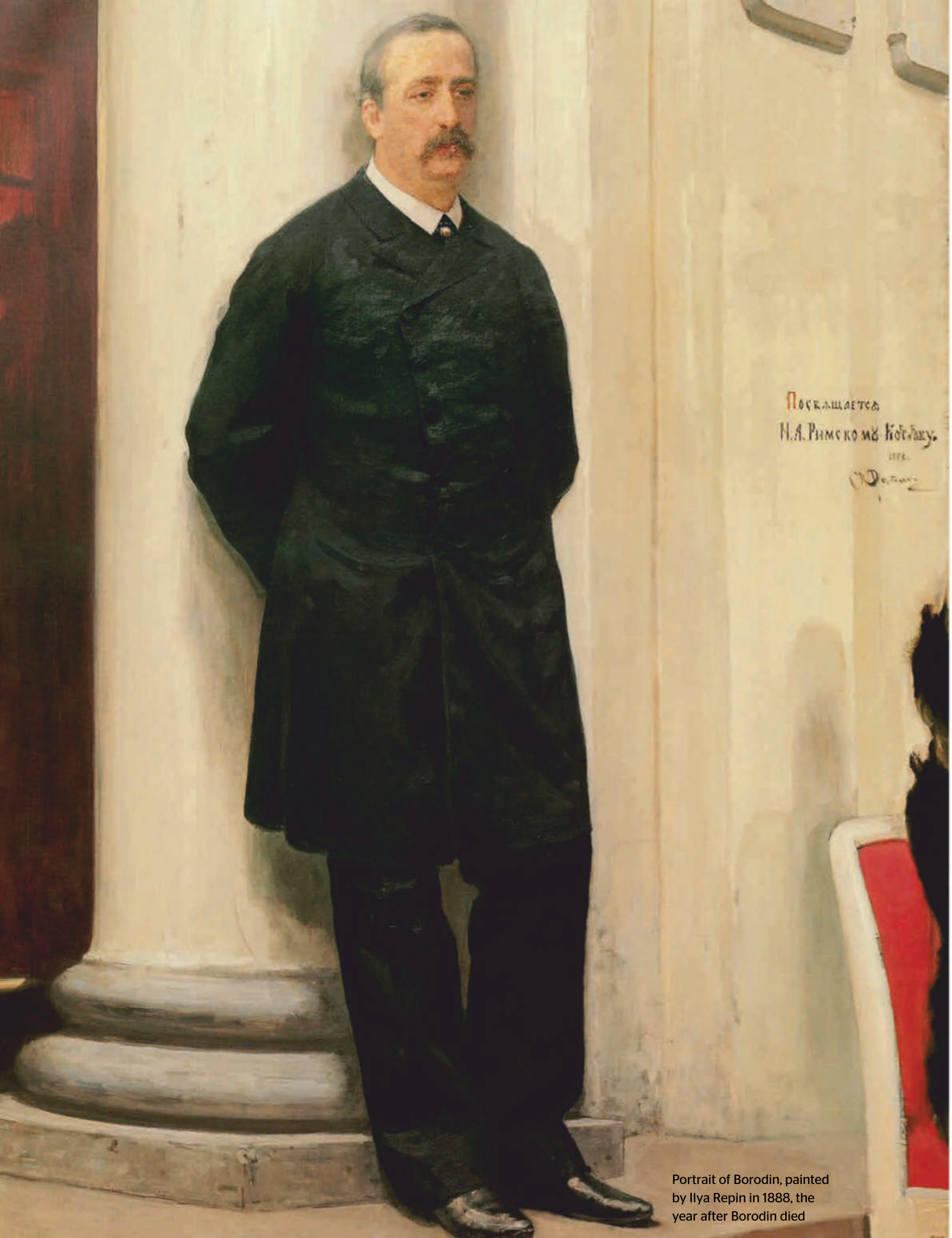
The Pro Arte Quartet were, I believe, the first group to record Borodin's complete work – in 1933 for HMV (7/34) – and the Belgian musicians come reasonably close to what's printed in the score, at least as far as tempos go. Yes, the first movement is a little too relaxed (closer to $\text{minim}=74$ than 84), but the musicians manage a sense of easy, forward motion, and much to their credit they interpret the *Animato* (a codetta to the exposition section) more as a sudden

leaping of the heart than the short-winded sprint one usually encounters (the Pro Arte are a hair slower here than the $\text{minim}=104$ mark, actually). Best of all, there's copious sunshine in their account; a leisurely tempo in this movement can evoke a starlit scene, pre-empting the Notturmo's special mood, but not here, thankfully. And the Pro Arte's Notturmo is lovely – the slowish (but not sluggish) tempo sustained through generous phrasing and enriched by graciously expressive portamentos.

With a running time of just under half an hour, Borodin's Second Quartet seemed tailor-made for the LP, fitting neatly on one side – although in the Galimir Quartet's account from 1950 (Nixa, 8/52), the finale spills on to side 2, and I'd imagine that the almost unbearably shrill sound must have tried the patience of even the most fervent advocates of the new technology. But if you happen upon the record and have the patience to withstand the aural onslaught, you'll hear an unusually passionate, firmly structured interpretation.

Turning to the **Hollywood Quartet** on a 1952 Capitol LP is like entering a different world, for not only is the sound quality quite fine (especially in Testament's CD transfer), the playing itself seems to take the pre-war Central European style, dripping with portamentos, and glam it up so that the textures glow like embers in a Silver Screen fireplace. By modern standards, perhaps, the dynamic range is somewhat flattened, but there's plenty of compensatory magic. Try at 4'27" in the Notturmo, where the violin vaporously shadows the cello line (*pianissimo* echoing *piano*), exactly as indicated in the score.

A 1956 HMV disc by the Haydn Quartet of Brussels (yet another fine Belgian ensemble) is well deserving of digital resuscitation for it also demonstrates that elegance and muscularity are not



Portrait of Borodin, painted by Ilya Repin in 1888, the year after Borodin died

mutually exclusive. Indeed, the first movement, taken just a few notches below Borodin's metronome marking, conveys a sense of euphoria and wonder. Equally worthy of reissue is a 1958 recording by the Hungarian Quartet led by Zoltán Székely (originally on a Columbia LP) in which tonal intensity plays as crucial a role as tempo. No other quartet I've heard has the boldness to paint Borodin's score with such richly saturated colours.

A RUSSIAN TRADITION?

I tried desperately to get hold of a 1937 Soviet recording by the Glazunov Quartet, not least because in his memoir, Valentin Berlinsky (cellist of the Borodin Quartet for more than six decades) refers to the Glazunov as 'the grandfather of modern Russian quartets'. I hoped their recording might get me closer to the origins of the music's interpretative tradition. Alas, I was only able to procure a 10" Supraphon disc of a Glazunov performance from the early 1950s – and what a disappointment. I guess I should have expected as much, for as early as 1947, Berlinsky writes about being disheartened by the Glazunov's precipitous post-war decline. In any case, this particular account is a mess: sluggish, undisciplined, beset with intonation problems and sometimes so heavily accented that the music's charms are crushed underfoot.

As for the **Borodin Quartet**, they recorded their namesake's Second Quartet at least five times over a span of more than 40 years, and – astonishingly, I'd say – despite various personnel changes, Berlinsky plays in all of them. Let's start with the version recorded in London for Decca in autumn 1962. Technically speaking, the performance is close to perfection – the players' collective tone is



Three strong contenders: (from top) the Hollywood Quartet, the Borodin Quartet, and the opulent Quartetto Italiano

wiry yet warm and their generous use of rubato gives the music an improvisatory air. That said, the Borodin can be almost *too* free with the score. This is most apparent – and, to my ears, distracting – in the finale, where Berlinsky starts the *Vivace* at a trudge and it takes a good 70 bars of gradual *accelerando* to reach the

main tempo. It's a cute conceit the first time you hear it but I find it doesn't hold up well. These and other liberties became ensconced in the Borodin's interpretation, so one hears more or less the same reading on the 1964 Melodiya remake (later reissued by Chandos and others) and even the *Gramophone* Award-winning 1980 Melodiya/EMI account. It's only on their most recent revisit (from a 2005 60th-birthday celebration released by Onyx Classics) that the then 80-year-old Berlinsky took a fresh look, did away with the *accelerando* and took Borodin at his word.

Of the five recordings, I'm most taken with the live account from the 1962 Edinburgh Festival. Despite rather poor sound and some slight technical imperfections in the playing, its overall frisson is irresistible – so much so that their other versions sound a little stiff by comparison. I love the Borodin's playfulness in the Scherzo, for instance, and how they make the last page of the Notturmo as quietly dramatic as an operatic scene. Of the studio recordings, the 1980 EMI account sounds to me the freshest. The work's opening phrases suggest awakening on an idyllic morning full of expectation; and note how at the beginning of the Notturmo, Berlinsky makes every note of his solo a profound pleasure. I love, too, the way the viola's tremolo near that movement's end suggests someone distantly strumming on an oud.

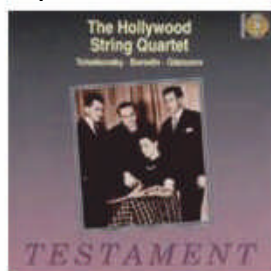
The Borodin Quartet's influence was incalculable. To wit, at least a dozen ensembles – including the Quartetto Italiano, the Fitzwilliam, The Lindsays and the Moscow – thought enough of Berlinsky's insertion of a gradual acceleration in the finale to copy it. I was almost surprised that cellist Alexander Korchagin of the **Shostakovich Quartet**

THE HISTORIC CHOICE

Hollywood Quartet

Testament ㉔ SBT1061

Old World charm gets the Hollywood treatment in this classic recording. If someone told me the performance's myriad beauties inspired the creators of



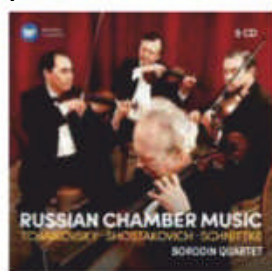
Kismet (the Broadway musical's homage to Borodin), I wouldn't be surprised in the least. But it's not all glam; the Hollywood's musical values are rock-solid.

THE BORODINS' BORODIN

Borodin Qt

Warner Classics ㉔ ㉔ 9029 52046-3

Each of the Borodin Quartet's five recorded versions has something special to offer. I couldn't part with their magical live performance from Edinburgh but this



Gramophone Award-winning studio recording from 1980 offers nearly as bewitching an experience in clear, modern sound.

THE OPULENT CHOICE

Quartetto Italiano

Decca ㉔ (37 discs) 478 8824DC37

Sometimes one hungers for sugary deliciousness, and if that's the case, the Quartetto Italiano's performance will satisfy that craving. Although it was recorded



back in 1968, Philips' engineering remains a marvel of acoustic warmth and presence. Borodin's melodic feast never sounded so sumptuous.

doesn't follow suit, although I feel the shadow of the Borodin can still be felt in the dewy morning song that launches their performance. In most respects, however, the Shostakovich go their own way and they are hardly lacking in ideas. In the Notturmo, for instance, Korchagin makes the melody's tiny ornaments marvellously expressive, and the duet between him and first violinist Sergei Pishchugin midway through the movement lingers with yearning and desire. They're definitely among the best of the Russian successors to the Borodin in this repertoire.

Take the **Moscow Quartet**, for example, who have something of the Borodin's tonal wiriness, but they tend to play too loudly, so the opening of the Notturmo seems meant for an arena rather than a more intimate space. The **St Petersburg Quartet** take the Borodin's improvisatory freedom and up the ante, turning in a performance of extremes. Their attempt to wring every drop of emotion from the work's opening phrases kills any feeling of momentum, which makes their mad dash at the *Animato* even more bewildering. They're a highly polished team who turn in some pretty playing in the Notturmo – here one can appreciate how well matched the players are when it comes to tone and timbre – but somewhere in all the sturm-ing und drang-ing, Borodin (the composer) gets lost.

It's a pity that an exceptionally sensitive reading by the Russian Quartet (Arte Nova) has gone out of print as it's admirably attentive to the score's details, bringing lithe muscularity where needed. Unlike the Moscow Quartet, say, they play the opening of the Notturmo in a hush, and manage to maintain this atmosphere of rapt tension to the final bar.

CZECH, PLEASE

Pass over the Prague Quartet's first stab at Borodin's Second Quartet (recorded in 1977 in Tokyo for Denon, 9/86 – nla), as it's all too loud and shockingly unsubtle. And although their 1981 Supraphon remake (5/03 – nla) is occasionally so languid as to suggest muscular atrophy, when they do hit the mark the result can be illuminating. They're one of the few ensembles who observe the *Vivace*'s metronome mark in the finale, demonstrating that scrambling is not necessary to communicate joyous bustle.

The **Talich Quartet**'s slightly sinewy tone may strike some listeners as just plain wrong for Borodin but this group has an unrivalled ability to convey deep emotion with the utmost simplicity and directness. The closely miked recording puts one right in the middle of the group,



The work's dedicatee, Borodin's wife Ekaterina

so it's even more remarkable how quiet their playing can be. In almost every phrase, the Talich go directly to the music's heart; as a result, their Notturmo may be the most wondrously artless on disc, and they also refuse to zip through the finale, so one really feels the tension between the fast-moving parts and the yearning, lyrical lines that hover above them. The **Pražák Quartet**'s rendition is also worth seeking out for its uniquely conversational tone and charmingly retro application of portamento, although the sound is over-bright.

THE AMERICANS

The Hollywood Quartet set a very high bar, and I don't think any American quartet has yet to equal their achievement. Both the Guarneri (RCA – nla) and the **Concord Quartet** seem to follow in their footsteps, seizing on lushness of texture and Romantic declamation. In fact, the Concord's ardour had me on the edge of my seat up until the finale, where they lost me in what sounded to me like a Keystone Kops chase.

I understand John Warrack's complaints about 'blandness' and 'predictability' in his *Gramophone* review of the Cleveland Quartet's performance (Telarc, 10/89 – nla), but for me the ensemble's warmth and sensitivity counteract such criticism. They savour even the subtlest harmonic shifts while retaining long-breathed phrasing. I'd take the Cleveland over the **Emerson Quartet** in a heartbeat, as the latter's propensity to fuss with detail quickly proves exhausting. I was similarly disappointed by the otherwise excellent **Escher Quartet**, whose matter-of-factness makes this magic-carpet ride of a work more like a dreary commute.

Perhaps the most wholly satisfying of the post-Hollywood 'American' versions comes from way further north. The Québécois **Quatuor Alcan** consistently bring delicacy and a delightful sense of playfulness to Borodin's score, and when romantic indulgence is called for (as in the Notturmo), they deliver the goods but without any hint of over-indulgence.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1952	Hollywood Qt	Testament (© SBT1061 (8/53 ^R , 8/95)
1962	Borodin Qt	Decca Eloquence (© ELQ480 7424
1962	Borodin Qt	BBC Legends (© ➤ ICAB5141 (6/02 ^R)
1964	Borodin Qt	Alto (© ALC1298; Chandos (© CHAN9965
1968	Quartetto Italiano	Decca (© (37 discs) 478 8824DC37 (5/69 ^R , 1/16)
1978	Concord Qt	Vox (© ➤ CDX5149
1980	Borodin Qt	Warner Classics (© (8) 9029 52046-3 (3/82 ^R , 5/88 ^R)
1980	Fitzwilliam Qt	Decca Eloquence (© ELQ480 3454 (2/82 ^R)
1984	Emerson Qt	DG (© 427 618-2GH (10/90)
1986	Talich Qt	La Dolce Volta (© ➤ LDV259 (5/88 ^R)
1993	Quatuor Alcan	Analekta (© ➤ FL2 3019
1993	Shostakovich Qt	Alto (© ALC1111
1995	Moscow Qt	Brilliant Classics (© (10) 93973
2000	Pražák Qt	Praga Digitals (© (CD) PRD/DSD250 282
2001	St Petersburg Qt	Dorian (© DOR90307
2002	The Lindsays	ASV (© CDDCA1143 (12/03)
2005	Borodin Qt	Onyx (© ➤ ONYX4002 (9/05)
2011	Steude Qt	Camerata (© ➤ CAM28236
2011	Leipzig Qt	Dabringhaus und Grimm (© MDG307 1758-2
2016	Goldner Qt	Hyperion (© CDA68166 (3/17)
2017	Escher Qt	BIS (© (CD) BIS2280 (3/18)
2018	Kang, Reszniak, Buntrock, Steckel	AVI-Music (© AVI8553101

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The Talich Quartet's recording in 1986 is faithful to Borodin's score yet rich in imagination

THE ANGLO PERSPECTIVE

I'd hoped the **Fitzwilliam Quartet** would bring their special feeling for Shostakovich's quartets to Borodin's Second, yet while they succeed at delimiting the music's intimate parameters, there's something about the chasteness of their approach which ultimately fails to satisfy. The Alberni Quartet (Collins Classics – nla) get so much right – the quiet ardour of the 'Baubles, bangles and beads' section, for instance – but intonation problems and an overly dry acoustic prohibit a positive recommendation. The Brodsky Quartet (Teldec – nla) offer memorable moments, too – the way they unfreight that seemingly inescapable *Kismet* tune from its Broadway associations, for instance – but much of their playing struck me as both overthought and overworked. And more or less the same can be said for the Chilingirian Quartet (Classic FM/ Sony, 8/98 – nla), who all too often fail to play softer than a solid *mezzo-forte*.

Turning from the Brodsky and Chilingirian Quartets to **The Lindsays** is a much-needed balm. Their playing is so tender and freely expressive, and the phrases bound together so tautly, that one can easily overlook the occasional spot of iffy intonation. They find impish humour in the Scherzo and turn the 'Baubles, bangles and beads' Trio into a whispered lyrical aside. I'm not so keen on their Berlinsky-inspired *accelerando* in the finale, though at least they don't rush through the *Vivace* with such haste as to overlook many of its felicities. But it's their deeply moving, fragile reading of the Notturmo that's the beating heart of their richly characterised performance.

The Lindsays' allure was never really about tonal beauty, per se, and much

the same can be said for the Australian **Goldner Quartet**, who paint with some fetching chiaroscuro in certain passages. Next to The Lindsays, however, their interpretation is seriously lacking in character.

EUROPEANS LOOKING EAST

If you enjoy record-hunting, consider adding a 1969 DG LP by the Drolc Quartet (3/70) to your want list, as their performance offers a near-ideal balance of ease and alertness as well as fine dynamic shading, all captured in a beautiful analogue recording. Those without a turntable might try a relatively recent release (2011) by the **Steude Quartet** that offers similar qualities. Perhaps the Steude's pacing in the *Allegro moderato* isn't a true *Allegro*, though its *gemütlich* character is as playful as it is sweet, and the confessional tone they bring to the Notturmo draws one in immediately. Throughout the entire work, the Steude seem to be playing for one another rather than to an audience, a strikingly different approach from, say, the **Leipzig Quartet**, whose overt reading appears designed for the formality of the concert hall.

A live recording from the 2018 Heimbach Chamber Music Festival featuring the violinists **Byol Kang**, **Anna Reszniak**, viola player **Barbara Buntrock** and cellist **Julian Steckel** has something of the Steude's lightness of touch, though with a bit more impetus. Both versions place the work as a successor to Mendelssohn's quartets rather than as a companion to Tchaikovsky's – food for thought.

DIFFICULT CHOICES

It's a shame that the Pro Arte Quartet's pioneering recording isn't readily available,

as it truly deserves to be the 'Historic Choice', though with their Old World sensibility, the Hollywood Quartet take that position handily (and handsomely). And, of course, any shortlist must include one of the Borodin Quartet's many versions, too – this despite my misgivings about the liberties they take with the score. From there the list becomes trickier to narrow down. I wouldn't want to be without The Lindsays for their imagination and tenderness, or the Quatuor Alcan for their elegance and élan.

And then there's the **Quartetto Italiano**. I must admit that of all the recordings (including the dozen or so that didn't merit mention here for one reason or another) this is probably the one that surprised me the most. To start with, I didn't expect them to reflect the Borodin Quartet's influence as strongly as they do, yet at the same time I wouldn't say they're at all beholden to that influence. They certainly don't seem interested in the music's muscularity, yet I found it impossible not to swoon over their interpretation which possesses passion, grace and an unmatched, mesmeric translucency. I'm quite sure it's not at all what the composer had in mind, and I'm just as sure that he would have been thoroughly over the moon about it. Obviously this can't be my top choice but it's definitely the one I'll take off the shelf when I simply crave blissful indulgence.

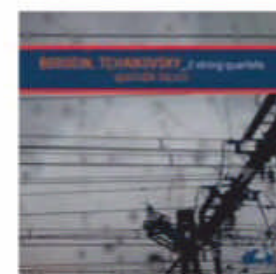
I didn't have a benchmark recording when I started this survey, to be honest – if pressed, I'd probably have said one of the Borodin Quartet's – but now I do, and that's the Talich Quartet's account. They're faithful to the score, rich in imagination and sincere in emotion, and they communicate with disarming intimacy. And remember, although Borodin was in his late forties when he composed the Quartet, he was celebrating one of the happiest times of his youth. This spirit of joy and sweet remembrance is at the core of the Talich's performance. **G**

THE TOP CHOICE

Talich Quartet

La Dolce Volta  LDV259

Conversational intimacy and emotions that come straight from the heart without pretense or fuss – these hallmarks of the Talich Quartet's interpretative style are as effective here as in Mozart or Beethoven.



The Talich follow the composer's markings faithfully but not slavishly, resulting in a performance as characterful as it is subtle.

ORANGES & LEMONS

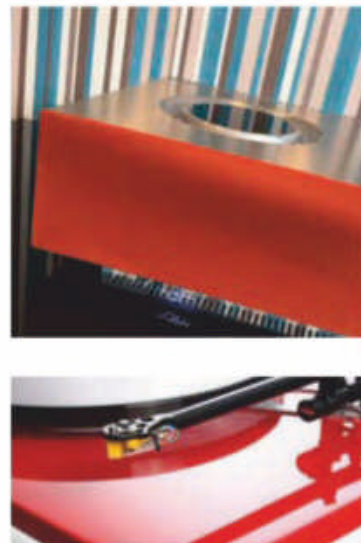
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NOVEMBER TEST DISCS



With a vibrant, open and very live sound in 96kHz/24-bit, this Beethoven set is an exuberant 85th-birthday celebration for Seiji Ozawa.



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New styles and a familiar name remembered

It seems to be a time for anniversaries but there are still surprises to be had in the world of hi-fi

Amid the bread and butter of hi-fi launches – new players, new amplifiers and the like – it's possible for the hi-fi industry to spring the odd surprise. One such was Rotel's announcement of new 'Tribute' versions of its A11 amplifier and CD11 player **1**, so called because they act as a tribute to audio guru Ken Ishiwata, who died last November. Having parted company with Marantz after more than 40 years, Ishiwata had been working with Rotel on the products to change components and tune the player and amplifier to create special versions. He died before the project could be completed but Rotel, with the permission of his son and daughter, continued the process, working with his long-term collaborator Karl-Heinz Fink to complete it. The result is the £399 CD11 Tribute and £499 A100 Tribute, with upgrades including improved capacitors in both audio and power sections, improved mechanical and electrical grounding, and measures to reduce vibration. The new models are now available in either silver or black and carry special 'Tribute' badging.

Although Arcam already has streaming products, from the little Solo Uno system to the SA30 amplifier, it has expanded its range with the addition of the ST60 **2**, its first dedicated network player. Selling for £1199, it will play music from UPnP network servers or online services including Deezer, Napster, Qobuz, Spotify and Tidal, has compatibility with both Apple AirPlay 2 and Google Cast, and has both MQA decoding and Roon-ready compatibility. At the heart of the player is the ESS9038 Sabre 192kHz/32-bit DAC, while inputs encompass Wi-Fi and Ethernet wired networking, a USB-A socket for storage



devices and both optical and coaxial digital. There are also optical and coaxial digital outputs, along with analogue outs on both RCAs and balanced XLRs, and the player can be controlled using the company's Music Life app.

Stablemates Naim and Focal have launched two new products marking the group's association with Bentley Motors, for which Naim supplies premium audio systems. There's a 'Naim for Bentley' of the current Mu-so all-in-one network system **3**, and the first headphones in the series, the Focal for Bentley Radiance. Both models feature styling cues reflecting Bentley design elements, not least the diamond pattern used in the quilting of the company's leather seating. The Naim Mu-so for Bentley Special Edition is the first wood-finished Mu-so model, using African ayous hardwood stained and lacquered to a unique finish, a smoked-effect plinth with the Naim for Bentley logo, copper threading in the speaker grille and a signature Bentley lattice finish surrounding the top-panel control; it sells for £1799. The £1199 Focal for Bentley Radiance headphones are a closed-back design with the earcups finished in Pittards gloving leather, as worn by Battle of Britain

Spitfire pilots. Other design elements include the same copper accents, inspired by Bentley's EXP 100 GT electric concept car, and that diamond lattice pattern. The headphones come with a case made from the same material as the special Mu-so's grille.

New from Danish company Dali is the Oberon C range of wireless active speakers **4**, which can be used with Bluetooth devices or via a dedicated sound hub with conventional hi-fi sources. The range includes a compact standmount/bookshelf design, the Oberon 1 C at £900/pr, the floorstanding Oberon 7 C (£1500/pr) and slimline wall-mountable On-Wall C (£1100/pr). The speakers share the cabinets and drivers of the existing passive Oberon models but also include a wireless model, 24-bit DSP crossover, DACs and two 50W Class D amplifiers in each speaker. The speakers can be used with the new Sound Hub Compact or the company's original Sound Hub, which has BluOS multiroom capability and is also Roon-ready.

McIntosh has added to its amplifier range with two more 'open chassis' designs, the £4295 C8 pre-amp and the £4995 MC830 monobloc power amp **5**. The C8 is powered by four 12AX7a valves and has both line and MM/MC phono inputs, with a DA2 digital module available as an option. It also has the company's High Drive headphone amplifier and Home Theatre passthrough for use in AV systems. Input selection, bass, treble, tone bypass, balance and input offset levels can all be adjusted using the front-panel knobs or remote control. The MC830 solid-state power amplifier offers 300W into 8 ohms, balanced and single-ended inputs, and the company's distinctive Dual Scale Watt meter. Extensive protection circuitry is also fitted. **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Marantz SACD 30n & Model 30

Heralding a new era for the company, complete with a change of design, this combination offers both flexibility and value for money

This is the second high-end SACD player/amplifier combination announced by Marantz in recent months, following hot on the heels of the SA-12SE and PM-12SE. But there's rather more to the SACD 30n and Model 30, which sell for £2700 each, and it goes beyond the change to the model designation convention the company has followed for many years.

Most obvious is the new styling of the duo, which apparently draws on the looks of classic Marantz models of the past, going all the way back to the company's original Audio Console, and to the Model 30 of the early 1970s. It breaks with a long-held tradition of all Marantz products looking basically the same, with the more upmarket designs distinguished by heavier casework and greater solidity – not that even the entry-level models were ever less than substantially built.

The new design, which sees the controls placed on a separate panel standing proud of the body of the units, will eventually find its way further down the Marantz range, replacing the previous softly curvaceous design language with a more square-cut style, and there's even a new tag-line for the future: 'Modern Musical Luxury'. This, it's said, is the culmination of a three-year Marantz project 'to reposition its future in the world of high-end audio, and modernise all aspects of the brand'.

Joel Sietsema, SVP of Brand at Marantz parent company Sound United, says: 'Our main goal in updating Marantz was to effectively capture the timelessness, musicality and passion the brand has brought to the world for nearly 70 years.'



MARANTZ SACD 30n

Type SACD/CD/network player/DAC

Price £2700

Discs played SACD, CD, CD-ROM, DVD-ROM

Sources Disc, UPnP network, USB storage, computer, digital in, online streaming, internet radio, Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay 2, HEOS

Digital inputs USB-A, USB-B, coaxial, optical

Digital outputs Coaxial, optical

Analogue outputs Fixed/variable, headphones

File formats Up to 384kHz/32-bit PCM and DSD256 via USB; up to 192kHz/24-bit and DSD128 via network

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44.3x19.4x38.2cm



MARANTZ MODEL 30

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £2700

Output 100Wpc into 8 ohms, 200Wpc into 4 ohms

Inputs MM/MC phono, four line, power amp direct

Outputs Line, pre-out, one pair of speakers, headphones

Tone controls Yes

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44.3x13x43.1cm

marantz.com

This is why we dove into the brand's history first to design the Model 30 and SACD 30n.

'We knew these new products and their successors had to continue refining that classic Marantz sound, but also deliver fresh new aesthetics and build quality that contemporary enthusiasts could love. The result is a familiar, yet entirely new Marantz ID and an exciting listening experience that delivers on the Marantz promise of the most musical sound.'

Available in either silver or black, and with a machined effect on the main front panel behind the section carrying most of the controls, the new design is likely to divide opinion, especially among those looking to combine the player or amplifier with existing Marantz components. However, viewed in isolation the two do manage to combine a 'refresh' with hints of the past, something Marantz has previously managed with the likes of its compact Music Link system, the retro-looking miniature HD-DAC 1 and HD-AMP 1, and its old-meets-new Consolette all-in-one wireless system.

Certainly the two new 30 Series components are attractive, not least because they're built on established Marantz technology – the amplifier in particular having much that's familiar from previous high-end models from the company. But the SACD 30n breaks new ground with its combination of SACD/CD playback, network audio capability and the integration of the Denon-developed HEOS multiroom system, rapidly spreading across the whole Sound United stable. Marantz has got close to this specification in the

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The Marantz Series 30 models will form the heart of a fine system. Complete it with these ...

QNAP

Network storage will hold your entire music library: this QNAP model will handle even the largest of libraries, thanks to its five-bay design.



VERTERE DG-1

The excellent phono stage here deserves a fine turntable: the innovative Vertere DG-1 will fit the bill.



past, notably with the ND8006 player, but this is the first time SACD has been added to the equation to create a complete digital music player.

It's been achieved with the use of a dedicated SACD/CD drive – also able to play music files on CD-ROM, all the way up to DSD files on DVD-ROM – and the Marantz Musical Mastering technology developed for the company's SA-10 player, launched a few years back (4/17). As well as its disc and network playback capability, the SACD 30n can also play files from USB storage, and has an asynchronous USB Type B input to which a computer can be connected. Conventional digital inputs are also provided and the player has both fixed and variable analogue outputs, so it could even be used straight into a power amplifier.

It can accept file formats up to 384kHz/32-bit PCM and DSD256 via USB, and 192kHz/24-bit and DSD128

This is the culmination of a three-year Marantz project to reposition its future in the world of high-end audio and modernise the brand

from network sources such as a NAS unit. Streaming options include Amazon Music HD, Spotify and Tidal; Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay 2 are built in; and of course there's that HEOS multiroom capability. The Marantz Musical Mastering system takes all incoming digital signals up to DSD128 (using dual master clocks and with user-selectable digital filters) and then 'converts' them using simple low-pass filtering for output. It's an elegant and effective alternative to conventional digital-to-analogue conversion.

As with recent Marantz amplifiers, the Model 30 only has analogue inputs, in this case running to five line inputs plus MM/MC phono, plus a direct power amp input. The phono stage uses the Marantz Musical Premium Phono EQ circuit, with a front-panel selector for MM input or three-stage impedance selection for MC cartridges alongside the amp's tone and balance controls.

The power amplifier here, quoted at 100Wpc into 8 ohms and double that into

4 ohms, is built around the same Hypex switching design found in other recent high-end Marantz amps, along with a high-current power supply, while the pre-amp has its own shielded transformer. Outputs are provided for a single set of speakers, along with pre-outs to feed an external amplifier or a subwoofer, and there's also a headphone output, as there is on the SACD 30n.

PERFORMANCE

That the new 30 Series combination sounds very Marantz is no bad thing; playing the Chailly/Filarmonica della Scala Respighi set (reviewed in this issue) from 96kHz/24-bit download, the presentation is instantly involving, with a bass that's warm without ever becoming over-bloomy, giving it impressive impact, and an open midband and treble to supply the sparkle of all those fountains. Sound-staging is open and focused, with both spread and depth, and with the Model 30 driving my Neat Iota Xplorer speakers the free-breathing sound is hard not to like.

Even when playing some live Proms from internet radio during my time with the pairing, the scale and finesse of the sound proved highly addictive, despite the reduced data-rate, while the way the pairing handles a high-resolution recording such as Johannes Moser's DSD 'EP' of Elgar's Cello Concerto is musically rewarding and demonstrates the quality of the engineering and production. This is heard to good effect on the live Beethoven Seventh recording released to mark the 85th birthday of conductor Seiji Ozawa. His Saito Kinen orchestra sounds vibrant and precise, and there's a lovely sense of the concert-hall space around the performers. It's a fitting celebration, and immensely enjoyable.

While playing a few LPs reveals the quality of the phono stage in the Model 30 amplifier, it's when the two 30 Series components are used together, under the control of the well-sorted HEOS app, that this combination really shines, delivering instant music – whether from online sources or the listener's own network library – and doing so to great effect. Both the player and the amplifier have that familiar Marantz trait of just

Or you could try ...

It's possible to build a system with the same functionality as the 30 Series from further down the Marantz range – well, almost. As mentioned in the main review, the ND8006 offers wide-ranging disc playback – if not SACD – and network capability, and could be combined with one of the company's less expensive amplifiers.

Naim ND 5 XS2 and Nait XS 3

Alternatively, if silver disc playback



is no longer important to you, then the combination of the Naim ND 5 XS2 and Nait XS 3 would be a great streaming set-up, with the added advantage of both a fine MM phono stage and an excellent headphone amp.

NAD M33

However, if you want to keep



things compact with a one-box solution, the excellent NAD M33 combines superb streaming with massively powerful and refined amplification, and is a joy to use.

Novafidelity X35

The budget option would be Novafidelity's



X35, which is not only an all-in-one 'just add speakers' streaming system but can also be fitted with internal storage, to which you can rip using the built-in disc drive.

sounding 'right', getting out of the way and letting the music flow through, whether with an orchestral work or the close focus of Jennifer Pike's recording of *The Lark Ascending*, accompanied by Martin Roscoe (9/20). This may be a more intimate reading than the more familiar orchestral version but the Marantz still manages to deliver the ethereal space of this delightful Chandos release.

While the styling of these new Marantz components may have something of the shock of the new about it, the sound quality is as reliable as ever. **G**

● REVIEW PHILIPS FIDELIO X3

A vintage audio brand comes in from the cold

Although Philips seems to have spent some time in the audio wilderness, these excellent headphones show the name still has much to offer

For a while, it looked as if the Philips name would disappear from the audio world. The Dutch parent company, with one of the longest histories in electrical and electronic products – it was founded in 1891 to make lightbulbs, as NV Philips Gloeilampenfabrieken – pulled in its horns and decided to get out of the consumer business in order to concentrate on health technology. Even its lighting business was spun off, and the company licensed out both its TV and audio businesses, meaning the company behind both the Compact Cassette and the CD, the first LaserDisc standard and Philips Records – not to mention the home of the likes of Pye and Grundig – had made its last hi-fi products. We'd come a long way from such famous products as its Black Tulip hi-fi separates and developments such as active motion feedback speakers.

After some unfortunate business shenanigans – the first new owner of the Philips brand for audio filed for bankruptcy – the name now seems safe as part of Hong Kong-based TPV, which makes Philips-branded TVs for sale in Europe, Russia, the Middle East and parts of South America and the Asia-Pacific region. The TVs are well established, including a partnership with Bowers & Wilkins to supply sound systems for some of its sets, so now the company is putting greater efforts into its audio products.

As the premium Philips audio offering, Fidelio plays a major part in that strategy. Launched with the £299 X3 headphones we have here, the Fidelio range is busy expanding with the L3 over-ear noise-cancelling 'phones and a pair of soundbars to boost TV sound, including a 7.1.2-channel model to which further wireless speakers can be added for an even more immersive experience.

Considering the brand appeared to be lost for a while in the 'general audio' (ie inexpensive) wilderness, the Fidelio X3 is an unashamedly premium product. It's an over-ear, open-back design and makes use of both proprietary technology and luxury materials, meaning that it feels reassuringly expensive even before you start using it. These include responsibly sourced Muirhead leather from Scotland on the headband and Danish Kvadrat acoustic



PHILIPS FIDELIO X3

Type On-ear open-back headphones

Price £299

Drivers 50mm multilayer

Sensitivity 100dB/1mW

Impedance 30 ohms

Frequency response 5Hz-40kHz

Dimensions (WxHxD) 19x23x11cm

philips.co.uk

fabric for the rear of the earpieces, allowing unimpeded airflow, while the whole unit has a real sense of solidity about it, right down to the satin-finished metalwork of the headband and hangers, aided by the cool black colour scheme, which adds both style and purpose. The X3 may only weigh 380g but it feels built to last, while the headband combines with memory foam in the velvet-coated ear-cushions to create a snug but not oppressive fit.

Half of the battle with headphone listening is to do with comfort, and the Fidelio X3 has that covered

The 50mm drivers here, which are tilted at 15 degrees to suit the shape of the ears, use multilayer diaphragms – with damping gel between the polymer layers – to create what's called Linear Motion Control technology. The layers are of varying thickness to tune the drivers to the enclosure, while ridging stiffens them for more accurate pistonic motion and the enclosures themselves are double-layered to combat resonances. Behind the drivers, which are powered by a neodymium magnet system, is a felt/paper barrier layer, designed to allow air to escape – reducing standing waves and back-pressure on the drivers – while keeping some of the outside sound

from reaching the listener. This gives some acoustic isolation, but you wouldn't want to use these headphones in noisy environments or sit next to someone listening to the Fidelio X3 with a spot of the old 'right hand down a bit' on their amp's volume control.

The detachable 3m oxygen-free cable comes with a 3.5mm-to-6.3mm adaptor, while a balanced cable is also supplied, using a 4.4mm plug. The cables are sheathed in soft fibre, which cuts down mechanical noise being transmitted if they brush against clothes.

PERFORMANCE

Half of the battle when it comes to headphone listening is to do with comfort, and the Fidelio X3 has that covered as soon as it's put on. The combination of lightness, adjustability and a snug fit without that feeling of having one's head in a vice make this an easy design to wear for long listening sessions. And that old idea that open-back headphones don't do bass is dispelled very rapidly by the rich, generous yet tightly controlled sound on offer.

Indeed, the comfort of the fit is matched by the smooth yet detailed presentation of these headphones. I tried them with everything from the output of the tiny Shanling M0 player to the high-quality output of my Naim Supernait 3 amplifier and that on the Marantz SACD 30n, and in each case found the sound both solid and well-scaled, yet with that open airiness that's a hallmark of headphones of this kind. The result is an effortless listen in which there's never any sense of the sound being inside the head, or that anything of importance is being glossed over.

Instead there's a very real sense of the scale and weight of instruments, from the lower octaves of solo piano to the power of a full orchestra, and both impact and finesse when they're required. Playing the Bach Collegium Japan's 30th-anniversary recording of Bach's *St John Passion* (A/20), made 'off the cuff' when a tour was cancelled – and almost truncated by the Cologne police demanding the concert hall be closed down! – the Philips headphones do a fine job with the spacious sound while also conveying the drama of the work and the quality of the performances. These are exceptionally well-sorted headphones, and excellent value for money. **G**

● ESSAY

Celebrating hi-fi heritage

We're used to companies marking their milestones but a 110-year heritage has some fascinating mileposts

Few hi-fi companies can claim a history going back over 100 years to the early days of music playback at home – after all, even *Gramophone* is still three years shy of its century! However, Denon has been in business for not just 100 years, but 110 – and it's marking the occasion with a special Anniversary 110 range of products. There's an SACD player and stereo amplifier, an AV receiver and even a special edition of its classic phono cartridge, itself launched all the way back in 1964, but the history behind the company is even more fascinating.

Although Denon may seem to be that most Japanese of companies, not least due to its associations with national broadcaster NHK and the Nippon Columbia record label, it was actually founded by an American entrepreneur, Frederick Whitney Horn. In 1910, working with Japanese associates, he started Nippon Denki Onkyō Kabushikigaisha (the Japan Electric Sound Company) as part of Nippon Chikuonki Shōkai (the Japan Records Corporation), the company going on to make the country's first gramophones and the discs to play on them.

The army raided the palace to destroy the discs and the recordings had to be smuggled out

Until then the parent company had been making single-sided discs for recording and the machinery used to create them, but alongside this business it moved into consumer cylinders, and then discs and their players, while still keeping its core business in the recording arena. That's put it at the heart of broadcast, recording and playback for the whole of its lifetime, from historic recordings to the birth of the LP and CD, all the way through to today's high-resolution formats, streaming and '3D' surround sound.

It wasn't until the 1930s that the company became Denon – taking the first letters of the parts of its name representing 'electric' and 'sound' – having merged with Japan-US Recorders Manufacturing very early in its history. But its main focus remained recording devices for the broadcast industry: by 1939 it had a

dedicated factory for making disc recorders and that year delivered a twin-disc transportable machine, the DR-148, to NHK. Using acetate discs, this enabled recordings to be played back immediately, which had obvious uses for news and other recordings. In fact it was designed to be ready for the 1940 Tokyo Olympics but – as we're so used to saying these days – events rather overtook the games.

However, Denon's recording technology was still set for a date with history. Its DP-17K machine would be used to record Emperor Hirohito's announcement to his people that the Second World War had ended. It wasn't a surrender speech – that word was never mentioned – but the whole thing was highly controversial and attempts were made by some army factions to stop the broadcast.

It took two takes to record the speech. On the first, to the consternation of the NHK engineers huddled over their recorders, the emperor spoke too softly for the equipment to capture his words clearly. Despite a concern that his voice was too high-pitched on the second take, and a few words were missed, that was the one to be broadcast to the nation. Elements of the army raided the Imperial Palace to destroy the discs, and the recordings had to be smuggled out of the palace to NHK HQ, one in a lacquer box, the other in a lunch-bag, and even there they weren't safe – again attempts were made to stop the transmission.

The emperor's words were broadcast at noon the next day, August 15, 1945 – the first time the Japanese population had heard him speak. Owing to the combination of his careful language and his use of old courtly Japanese, not everyone understood what he was saying: an announcer had to tell listeners what was meant after they had heard the speech, and reports suggest many people went home to consider what they had just heard. For some years the original recording was considered lost, with only a backup made secretly by a technician surviving; it was later recovered, and together with the original recording machine remains in the NHK archive.

By 1948 NHK had adopted Denon's R-23-A disc recorder/player as a standard and it was installed in its studios across the country. But the tape-recording and LP age was approaching: by the late 1950s



Denon engineers making the company's disc recorders at its Mitaka plant in the 1940s



A Denon disc recorder was used to record Emperor Hirohito's 1945 speech to his people

the company's disc recorder plant had almost completely switched to making tape machines and in 1963 the company launched its first pickup cartridge for playing records, the DL-103. Originally designed for professional use, it went on to be a classic buy for hi-fi enthusiasts and is still in production today.

It wasn't until 1970 that the company name started to appear on products aimed at consumers, but on the professional side the company was working on the first eight-track digital recorder and in 1972 Denon delivered the system, the size of several filing cabinets, to NHK. Its first CD player was also a professional-use machine: the DN-3000F was launched for studio use in 1981, ahead of the consumer debut of CD the following year, and came with facilities we now take for granted such as search and instant start. The first consumer machine, Denon's first consumer CD player, the DCD-2000, was followed just a year later by the DCD-1800, using the Denon Super Linear Converter. It was created by the company's Shirakawa Audio Works, north of Tokyo, which is where many Denon products, including the 110th Anniversary models, are still made. ⑥

NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com; email is preferable at this time

Bravo, 2020 Awards! ...

Many thanks for the video of the 2020 *Gramophone* Awards which I've just been privileged to watch on YouTube.

While I realise many others have suffered more, 2020 has been extremely challenging for me – losing my job, being stranded overseas, and then facing various hardships on return to my home country. Listening to classical music has been a great help, and your magazine, emails, Orchestra of the Year initiative and now this broadcast have been part of that musical support. As an added bonus, it was especially pleasing to see (and hear) many of my favourite composers, artists, recordings and labels honoured this year.
Gavin Roberts, via email

... for lifting our spirits ...

I've just finished watching the full programme and thought it was superb. Brilliantly assembled and edited, and some astonishing performances. I was particularly moved by the high standard of the performances in such difficult times.
*Garfield Southall
Chester*

... but should 'Historic' return?

I enjoyed watching the event online enormously. The award categories seem fairly representative of the recordings which appear month by month – except that there's no Historic category. This year, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Barbirolli, we've had the opportunity to acquire all his EMI and Pye recordings issued by Warner and his RCA and Columbia recordings issued by Sony, achievements surely worthy of consideration for an award if ever there was one. I do hope that in future years the Historic category can be resurrected.

*David Greening
King's Lynn, Norfolk*

Praise for Weinberg (& Mirga)

I have been reading *Gramophone* and listening to recorded classical music for the best part of 60 years. In that time my listening, and my knowledge of music, has been vastly expanded and enriched by discoveries that I believe could only have been brought to me via LP, via CD and now via downloads. Recorded music has now produced another example of how important it is in opening our ears – the music of Mieczysław Weinberg.

Letter of the Month

Remembering Eric Parkin, who died at 95

I recently learned that Eric Parkin died on February 3 at the age of 95. His death has thus far gone largely unnoticed. My own awareness of it dawned only because his collection of printed music appeared in the Reading Oxfam Music shop; inside one of the pieces of music was a 1999 letter from me to Eric, and the person who bought the music then emailed me, referring to Eric as 'the late pianist'.

I first met Eric at the Bowdon Festival in the summer of 1979. As this was the John Ireland centenary year, and John Ireland had been born there, the festival celebrated the occasion. Eric was one of the artists and I asked him to sign my copies of the Lyrita LPs of Ireland's piano works.

In 1994, I reissued the Thurston Dart organ recordings under licence from EMI and decided, since it was the Moeran centenary, to investigate commissioning a new recording of the



Parkin excelled in English piano music

Moeran piano works. I phoned Eric and he was very keen, agreeing to the job for a fraction of his normal fee. He also secured a small grant from the John Ireland Trust. The sessions were at Radley College on Saturday October 29, 1994. We booked the Silk Hall for

two days, but got through all the music in just one. Eric was very good to work with and I've always been grateful to him for creating a recording – the only new one made in Moeran's centenary year – that has been both artistically and commercially successful. A year later he made a CD of piano music by Geoffrey Bush, who'd introduced him to Ireland.

I never met Eric after the Bush sessions but phoned him from time to time. He'll be warmly remembered for his artistry, especially in the field of English music of the early 20th century.

*J Martin Stafford
Solihull*

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Each Letter of the Month now receives a **RAYMOND WEIL *toccata* classic wristwatch** RRP £595



I found myself in complete agreement with the discussion on your recent Awards podcast about Weinberg's music. This has been a major discovery for me, and so much of this is once again thanks to the recorded music industry and *Gramophone* (I read with enormous interest David Fanning's essay in your December 2019 issue about the man, his life and his music). Perhaps he has been uniquely disadvantaged by the confusing spelling of his surname (not to mention the variants of first name!) – I recently came across a Melodiya/HMV LP, recorded in

1962, of Kogan and Kondrashin playing the 'Vainberg' Violin Concerto!

So, naturally, I find myself in enthusiastic agreement with the choice of the revelatory DG recordings of Symphonies Nos 2 & 21 by the Kremerata Baltica, Gidon Kremer, the CBSO, and the wonderful Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla as *Gramophone's* Recording of the Year. If I may, could I endorse one of Mr Fanning's recommendations? It's another recording by Gidon Kremer and his Kremerata Baltica, and it's of Weinberg's Chamber

Symphonies Nos 1-4, late works, issued by ECM New Series in 2017 ... and as easy as it is to overlook in the small print, you'll discover that Chamber Symphony No 4, recorded in 2015, is conducted by a then barely known young female conductor – one Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. *Robin Durham, Shrewsbury, Shropshire*

Editorial comments

Regarding Richard Whitehouse's review of Rouse's Symphony No 5 (p42, October), he actually died last year, not this year.

In Edward Seckerson's review of two versions of *Das Lied von der Erde* (p92, Awards), he writes that Wunderlich would never have sung the work live; in fact, he performed it live on at least two occasions.

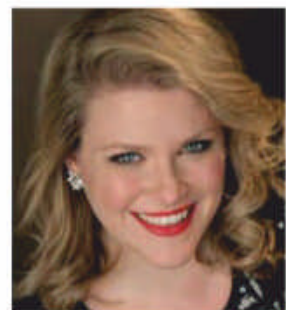
OBITUARY

ERIN WALL

Canadian soprano

Born November 4, 1975

Died October 8, 2020



The Canadian soprano Erin Wall has died of breast cancer at the age of 44. She was known and loved by audiences in concert halls and opera

houses in the US and Europe, as well as by all those who bought her many recordings of repertoire as wide-ranging as Handel, Mozart, Massenet and Britten.

Born in Alberta, Wall was brought up by professional-musician parents in Vancouver but only took up singing in her final year of high school. After applying to music college and being turned down, she tried again the following year and ended up studying at Western Washington University and Rice University, Texas.

She became a popular presence on the concert stage in the UK, making her British debut in Britten's *War Requiem* at St Paul's Cathedral under Sir Andrew Davis in 2002. A year later, she was a finalist in the Cardiff Singer of the World competition, after which an international career swiftly beckoned. As *Opera Now* wrote, 'Cardiff Singer delivered a very high standard this year ... Erin Wall, an elegant 27-year-old with a well-formed vocal technique ... showed signs of becoming an outstanding interpreter of [the title-role in *Thaïs*].'

Indeed, she went on to define this role as her own; when she performed it in concert at the Edinburgh Festival in 2011 she was the only soloist to sing from memory, her 'magnificent high D shaking all available chandeliers', according to one critic. Her recording of the same role with Davis and his Toronto forces for Chandos earned a credible review in *Gramophone* just a few months ago: 'Her tone is warm and beguiling, her dramatic commitment rarely in doubt,' wrote Tim Ashley (8/20).

Wall's big break on her own side of the Atlantic came a year after the Cardiff competition, in 2004 at Chicago Lyric Opera where she spent the early years of her career. When the Finnish soprano Karita Mattila was taken ill the day before the opening night of *Don Giovanni*, Wall promptly stepped in and brought the house down. As *Opera Now* wrote, 'Mattila's exit saw Erin Wall grab her chance as Donna Anna, to wild bravos and thunderous applause'; while her soprano was described in the *Chicago Sun Times* review as 'a gleaming, flexible instrument'.

The music of Strauss and Mahler also featured in Wall's repertoire, both on stage and on record, particularly Mahler's Eighth Symphony. In a review of her recording with Michael Tilson Thomas and his San Francisco forces from 2008, Rob Cowan wrote: 'With wonderful sound, superb playing and generally fine singing – soprano Erin Wall is exceptional – I would rate this new version among the top two or three.' (4/10)

In December 2019, she performed the role of Ellen Orford in Britten's *Peter Grimes* to a standing ovation at the Royal Festival Hall. Her recording of the same role, with Stuart Skelton as Grimes and Edward Gardner conducting his Bergen forces, was *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month as recently as October this year, Mike Ashman referring to the overall endeavour as 'an exciting, committed, necessary and brilliantly recorded version for our times' and singling out Wall's Ellen as 'continuing what has almost become a tradition of natural-sounding and emotionally paced North American interpretations of the role'. A day after Wall's death, Skelton himself praised her as 'a glorious Ellen and a hilarious and genuinely wonderful colleague'.

The Erin Wall Tribute Fund at Canadian Opera Company has since been established by her family in memory of her life and to provide vital support to the future of opera. Visit coc.ca/support for more information.

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As yet another impressive and memorable year of recordings draws to a close, our expert reviewers choose the albums they can't get enough of

Missa solemnis

With 'Beethoven Year' celebrations nearly over, Peter Quantrill surveys the mighty *Missa solemnis* in this month's Collection. From a hefty list of recordings, which one will come out on top?

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Brahms Pf Son No 3. Scherzo, Op 4. <i>Bronfman.</i>	🇫🇪 🇩🇪 NI2586
Poulenc Story of Babar. <i>Margolyes/Callaghan.</i>	🇫🇪 NI1571
Taylor Syms Nos 4 & 5. Romanza. <i>English SO/BBC NOW/Woods.</i>	🇫🇪 NI6406
Thomas, AR Auditions. <i>ICE Ens/Kaziboni.</i>	🇫🇪 NI6402
Various Cpsrs French Bonbons: Romantic Org Wks. <i>Lester.</i>	🇫🇪 NI5999
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Bennett, E Psychodelia. <i>Various artists.</i>	🇫🇪 NMCD257
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OEHMS	<i>oehmsclassics.de</i>
Barber. Copland. Dvořák From the New World – Org Transcrs. <i>Albrecht, H.</i>	🇫🇪 OC475
ONDINE	<i>ondine.net</i>
Auvinen Orch Wks. <i>Finnish RSO/Lintu.</i>	🇫🇪 ODE1326-2
Bruckner Motets. <i>Latvian Rad Ch/Kļava.</i>	🇫🇪 ODE1362-2
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Bernstein West Side Story. <i>Masin/Melisma Sax Qt.</i>	🇫🇪 ORC100145
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Various Cpsrs Transatlantic – Wks for Vn & Pf. <i>Smart/Uttley.</i>	🇫🇪 ORC100149
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Various Cpsrs Correspondances. <i>Christophe Panzani Qnt/Voce Qt/Arte Combo.</i>	🇫🇪 OTN638
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Borzík Signum magnum. <i>Zoe Ch & CO/Olos.</i>	🇫🇪 PA0184-2-131
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Various Cpsrs Fantastic Landscapes of Songs. <i>Beláček/Ens Op Diversa/Mucha Qt.</i>	🇫🇪 PA0178-2-131
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Bach, JS Musical Offerings. <i>Calefax.</i>	🇫🇪 🇩🇪 PTC5186 840
Beethoven Cpte Syms. <i>WDR SO/Janowski.</i>	🇸🇩 🇩🇪 PTC5186 860
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
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
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Jörg Widmann

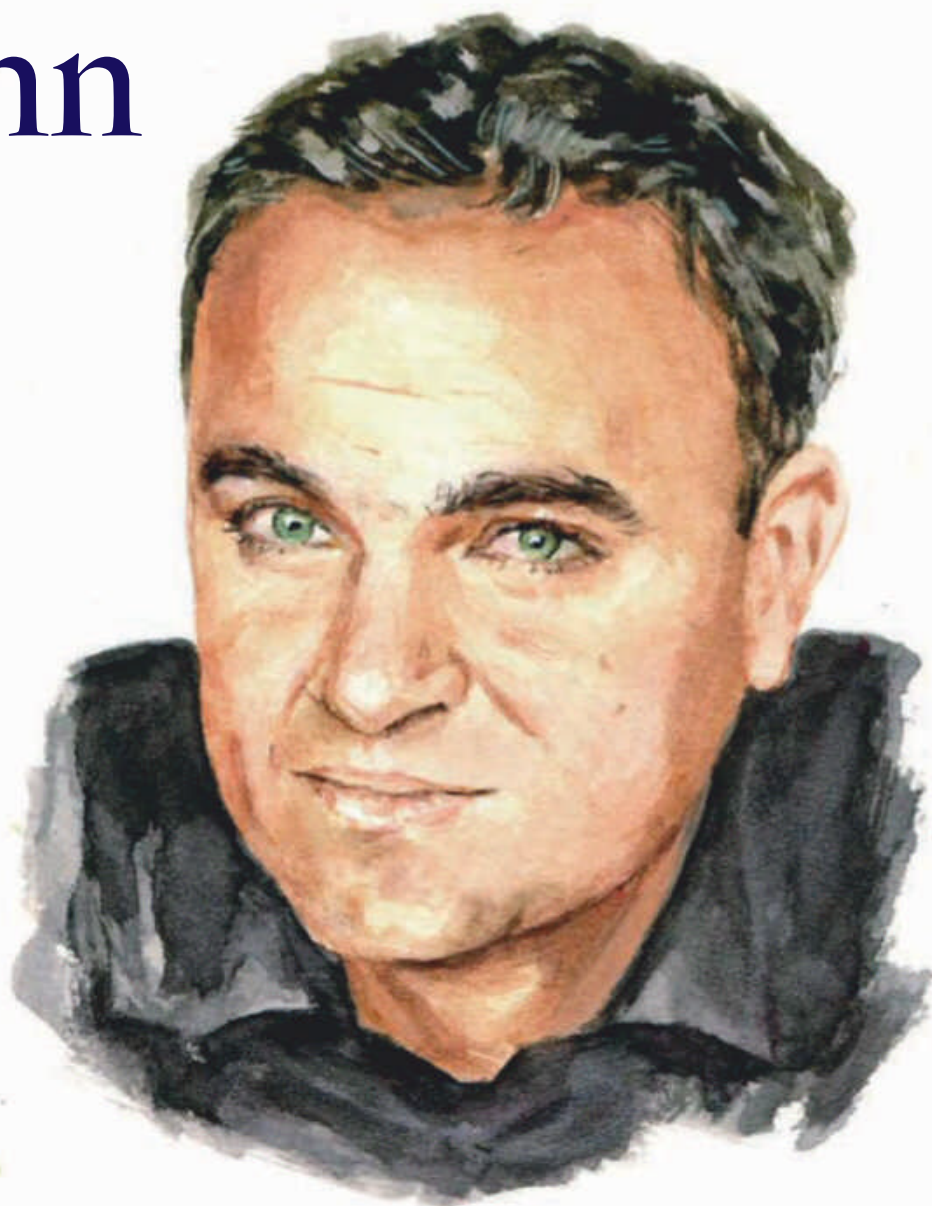
The composer and clarinettist reflects with **Peter Quantrill** on the challenges Beethoven poses to him as both artist and listener

Beethoven became an important figure in my music quite late on, and only thanks to someone we all miss, Mariss Jansons. He rang me one day and asked if I could imagine writing a kind of overture to a concert of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. I remember how my jaw dropped. After I recovered I told him how much he was pushing at an open door as far as the Seventh was concerned, but the Eighth was another matter. And he replied, 'Maybe it's interesting for you to study this amazing score. Maybe it will do something to you.' And the result was *Con brio*, which became one of my most performed pieces. The timpani part is insanely difficult. I could never have imagined that from youth orchestras to the Vienna Philharmonic people would play this piece.

In composing *Con brio*, I wanted to find out what was it about the Seventh that I loved so much. But studying the Eighth made me wonder if it is really the first postmodern symphony. The third movement is a minuet on a minuet. And what he does especially in the finale is to emancipate the timpani, which is why I wrote such a difficult part. There's the famous quote by Weber about Beethoven being ready for the madhouse, and I take that seriously. In a great interpretation of the Seventh we should be able to feel the shock, the earthquake which it caused at the time. I took up the clarinet at the age of seven, and Beethoven's *Gassenhauer* Trio was one of the first pieces I played. I was immediately fascinated by the development section of the first movement (*Allegro con brio*): there is an obsessive quality that does not let go. Goethe talked about chamber music being a conversation between civilised men, but already in this early piece Beethoven contradicts him. When I began composing my own music, I admired him, I feared him a little: he was always there, a distant planet.

Two years ago I began a second cycle of five string quartets, and I called them 'studies on Beethoven'. I wanted to deal with the whole cosmos of his quartets, in particular the quartet of quartets, Op 130. It reminds me of a line of Hölderlin: 'Komm! ins Offene, Freund!' (Come into the unknown, my friend'). The *danza tedesca* – that's a tough cookie! It feels as though the melody is already variation no 15 on some hidden theme – so I wrote variations on it in my Eighth Quartet. Why does the cello play in a different metre to the others? Why are there rests in the middle of the theme? What does he want to tell his fellow Germans about their relationship to dance?

When I am reading a piece like Op 130, I feel sorry for the string quartets who are playing it. What a gift it is to them, but at some point you have to decide on one version, one tempo, phrasing and articulation. Every law that Beethoven defines at



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one stage he breaks at the next, and you want to convey how it might have sounded as well as how it actually does. If I continue to study it for another 20 or 30 years, I don't believe I'll ever have the key which will always open the door.

Beethoven is awkward, even from early on. The wind writing of the Septet Op 20 is already so different from Mozart. Later on he distanced itself from it because of its success. Twelve years on from *Con brio*, I have nothing against it – I have conducted it many times myself – but I confess I have a natural distance from it now. Maybe it's like with children; I don't have any more doubts or any less love for some of my pieces which haven't been heard since their first performance. We're not in the pop industry. If we start occupying ourselves with this or that trend we should stop anyway. I believe in two sentences. Schoenberg said: 'Art does not come from being able to do it but having to do it.' Beethoven wrote at the head of the *Missa solennis*, which remains one of his most complex and least understood works: 'From the heart – may it return – to the heart.' This sentence breaks my heart. The way from his heart to ours is sometimes paved with stones, and cannonballs – he does not make it easy for us. But the two expressions have a yin/yang relationship. You cannot have one without the other. ⑥



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